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THE WELL-MEANING YOUNG MAN

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BY LUISE AND
MAGDALEN KING-HALL



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To

OUR PARENTS

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I

IRELAND

MOTHERS of sons, sympathise with the mother of Daniel Cavanagh!

If the man-child that Providence has bestowed upon you has reached the danger zone that lies between the ages of seventeen and twenty-three, it is probable that you yourself have experienced those anxieties which rend the mother's heart in a world where jobs are few and distractions abound.

The classic joy of bringing a child into this already over-populated world is tempered for the thoughtful mother by the realisation that she is introducing a stranger into the family circle.

How is this stranger going to behave? There is always the danger of its reproducing the maternal faults or, more blood-curdling possibility, of its repeating the paternal imperfections, to say nothing of a fresh supply of vices, errors and back slidings picked up in goodness knows what murky atavistic highways and byways!

When the mewling babe is placed for the first time in the mother's arms with the information that it is of the male sex, her pride is generally greatly increased.

She has given birth to the noblest beast of all—Man!

This innocent if primitive arrogance grows with the years.

But her glory has its disadvantages. Disadvantages that the proudest mother of sons learns to appreciate in time.

For instance, jobs—daughters-in-law!

Daughters-in-law in particular hang like a sword of Damocles over the head of the devoted mother, who is only too well aware of the unscrupulous cunning of her own sex when on the outlook for a husband, and the lamentable folly of her son's sex when in the mating mood.

Lady Cavanagh of Bally Cavan House, Southern Ireland, had had in her own, her husband's and her relations' opinion, more than her fair share of maternal worries with regard to her youngest son, Daniel De Lacy Cavanagh.

Her only daughter, Gilla, had been married for ten years to Cecil Hanbridge, a brilliant and charming man who was British Resident at Sholapurta, India. Her two elder sons, Alan and Ronald, were proving credits to the Army and Navy respectively, and had at suitable ages taken to themselves satisfactory wives, in each case introduced or encouraged by their mother. Between the lot of them a sufficient number of sturdy grandsons had been produced to insure that the Cavanagh estates would never pass into the hands of cousins. These gratifying family facts, however, did not assuage Lady Cavanagh's disappointment in Dan's career up to date.

Deplorable career, if indeed it could be honoured with the name!

Dan's success at his public school was a disputed point in the family circle, his undoubted popularity doing little to take the sting from his reports, which term after term grew more and more discouraging from a scholastic point of view.

Schooldays were over before his parents had time to turn round. It must have been Dan's tall, distinguished appearance, combined with some faint hopes held out by his "coach" at Westgate-on-Sea, that had induced his parents to attempt to dedicate him at first to a Diplomatic career. It was generally agreed that he had tact, and "a way with him" that might be invaluable in charming intractable foreigners. By the time that he had reached the age of seventeen and a half these hopes had proved to be fallacious, and he had passed rapidly into the financial world, as represented by a temporary post in a Dublin bank, where under the supervision of the bank manager, an old acquaintance of his father's, it was supposed that he would learn to work, while Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh looked round for a more suitable job for him. Suitable, that is to say, not for what he was at present, but for what his father and mother expected him to develop into. Like all parents worth their salt, Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh were sustained, with regard to their offspring, by lively faith, boundless hope and a reasonable amount of charity.

Sir Seymour had once read in a book of memoirs

a dictum of the late Lord Fisher's, to the effect that the whole duty of parents was "first to pay and then to pray." He had been so impressed by this remark that he had neatly underlined it in pencil for the enduring edification of the other members of the circulating library, adding in the margin, "Very true," and had then copied it into his leather note book.

Life, with its usual trickiness, forestalled the plans of these estimable parents. In spite of the daily efforts of a motherly landlady to rouse Dan from his bed, hurry him through a hasty breakfast and out of his Dublin lodgings at an early hour, his chronic unpunctuality caused growing dissatisfaction with the authorities at the bank. The evil hour might however have been indefinitely postponed had not Dan, oppressed by the monotony of checking figures on a bleak winter's afternoon, slipped off in the temporary absence of his "boss" to the Regent Cinema round the corner, where a remarkable educational film was being shown entitled, "Marvels of the Insect World."

Dan, though a country lad, had not come to admire the frenzied activities of these microscopic creatures. It was the attractions of Opal Anderson in "Silk Legs" that had drawn him from his duties. She followed closely after the insect film and he was beginning to sit up and enjoy himself when he found himself being angrily observed by the bank manager himself, who was a keen entomologist, and a prominent member of the Dublin League of Nature.

Disaster was not averted by Dan's promptitude in rushing headlong from the cinema and back to his lodgings, where with Spartan courage he cut his right hand with a penknife, thus enabling him to turn up at the bank next morning with a bandaged hand and with what he hoped was a plausible excuse for his absence the previous afternoon. His parents were informed in a confidential letter that he "had no aptitude for banking, and seemed more suited to an open air life," and so he returned in disgrace to Bally Cavan.

Here he remained for some weeks under a black cloud of parental disapproval, to which he resigned himself with natural dignity. The isolation, almost amounting to coventry, to which he was condemned by general consent of the family circle, only relaxed on the question of hunting. Sir Seymour Cavanagh would no more have thought of depriving his son of a mount, as long as there was a spare horse in the stables, than of depriving him of the privilege of going every Sunday to listen to the Rev. Desmond Donoghue's interminable sermons in the parish church.

The full bitterness of his position was brought home to him not so much by the unremitting efforts of his parents, as by the arrival home on leave of his eldest brother, Major Cavanagh, and his wife Agatha. Alan Cavanagh was an efficient successful person, and his smart tweed-clad wife was as efficient in her way as he was in his.

She was the type of young woman that can only

be found in England. She was tall, well built, clear-complexioned, bright-eyed, discreetly made-up, especially about the lips, with glossy hair smartly shingled, and shapely, well-kept hands that were perpetually occupied with a cigarette. Her style of attire inclined to monotony in its uniformed smartness, but at the same time, few sartorial changes escaped her notice. If brooches were being worn in the front of felt hats instead of at the side, then Agatha Cavanagh's small regimental badge of real diamonds and pearls was the first to make the move.

Her lithe figure was shown off at its best when she was swinging triumphantly round a golf course (she was well known in the women's amateur golfing world) or when she was on a horse, either taking her own line of country in the Irish hunting field, or winning cups at English gymkhanas.

She glowed with health and youthful vitality and seemed a twentieth century Atalanta, a splendid specimen of up-to-date British womanhood. Her only drawbacks were her uncompromising rudeness, which became positively barbaric when she was travelling on the Continent, her scornful prejudices with regard to everything and everybody that did not fit into her docketed view of the universe, her rigid snobbishness, her abysmal ignorance of all subjects except the few that interested her, and her complacent selfishness that a successful marriage and motherhood had done nothing to soften.

Physically made to please, she was lacking in all

allure. In spite of her decorativeness, she seemed to render pointless the immemorial difference between the sexes. She had as much "sex appeal" as the Bank of England, much less mysterious challenge than an Income Tax form!

Her husband, as fine a man as she was a fine young woman, admired, honoured and agreed with her. They did not discuss many subjects, other than their own affairs, but they were certainly of one mind on the subject of Dan. It seemed to them unsuitable that the youngest of the family should be attracting attention of even an uncomplimentary nature. After all they were parents, and it is unpleasing to parents, and quite rightly so, to see good family money being diverted to unsatisfactory younger brothers. In their different ways, they showed him that at present they considered him "a blot on the landscape," and a possible menace for the future. Agatha ignored him and when Alan spoke to him it was in a tone of aggressive command. Though no longer able to throw at him the "Fetch my boots, worm!" of earlier fagging days, he managed to keep him on the move, on the principle that a little service discipline did no one any harm. He was quite right of course. Between them they made Dan's life a burden. It took a good deal to do that.

To escape the sight of Alan "tackling" their father in the smoking room and Agatha "talking it over" with her mother-in-law in their daily tours of the kitchen garden, Dan spent most of their ten

days' visit lurking in the stables, where he helped to clean up the harness and held weighty conversations with Jo the head-groom.

Though Dan gravely and mournfully agreed with his brother's gruff pronouncement that "some immediate action ought to be taken" with regard to his jobless condition, he had himself no definite views on the subject, till one morning when the idea flashed through his mind that he might be a success as a veterinary surgeon. He had always had an exceptionally good hand with animals in their hours of ease or sickness, so why not put this talent of his to pecuniary use? Why hide his solitary light under a bushel?

These thoughts filtered slowly through his mind as he bent over "Juno," his brother's retriever. She had recently returned from an illicit hunting expedition with a torn ear, and was now lying on straw in a loose box in a state of mental collapse. Dan had plenty of time in which to attend to her. Hunting was over for the season as far as he was concerned. Alan, the one member of the Cavanagh family who had bad hands, a bad seat and a bad temper when in the saddle, had all but cut the legs off "Jemima" the spare mount, while taking a stone wall, on his second day out.

Alan and Agatha departed next day in an aura of self-satisfaction and Dan sprung his great resolution on his parents. The effect was dynamic. They visualised him loafing indefinitely about the estate on the excuse of gaining practical experience for his

veterinary career. Lady Cavanagh's mouth became grim, and after an all-night consultation with his wife, Sir Seymour went up next day to Dublin, and secured Dan a job in the well-known firm of McGowanan and Smith, rope manufacturers.

Dan remained in this position for exactly six months, just long enough to become a very popular figure in the more mixed circles of Dublin society, thus causing considerable anxiety to his parents, who were not snobs but could not help being Cavanaghs. They were also concerned at his lack of prospects, as it was soon apparent that he would never climb to giddy heights in the rope world. When they discovered that at his present rate of progress, he would at the end of seven years get a rise of twenty pounds, it almost seemed to them that they had indeed deliberately put into his hands the rope with which to hang himself.

These fears were not to be justified. McGowanan and Smith went bankrupt, owing to a quantity of excellent reasons which the directors tried in vain to explain to a mass meeting of incredulous and excited shareholders, and Dan again returned home to his parents, who now felt as though they were suffering from a chronic toothache.

Dan himself could not help being in the best of spirits. He considered that this time he was the innocent victim of circumstances, and that as such he could enjoy his unlooked-for leisure with a clear conscience. Not finding the Bally Cavan House at-

mosphere very responsive, he spent most of his time attending the local point to point races or scouring the countryside on his second-hand motor-cycle. At the end of three weeks, he was brought home unconscious, having collided at high speed with a farmer's cart.

His mother's matter-of-fact heart turned to water as she beheld her youngest born laid on the dining room table, his head swathed in gory bandages, his eyes closed in what she thought for an awful moment was the sleep of death, till Doctor Gallagher remarked brightly, "Now don't you worry, Lady Cavanagh. The boy's cracked his skull a wee bit. We'll soon have him out and about and on his machine again." After which cheering promise Lady Cavanagh was left to nurse her son through six weeks of concussion.

The rain and wind of a raw afternoon beat on the windows of Bally Cavan House. In the library, Dan, pale and convalescent, sat at the tea table buttering potato cakes for himself. Lady Cavanagh was behind the urn, knitting in hand. Sir Seymour was smoking a pipe by the fire and looking over a sheaf of papers connected with the estate. He was a tall, very thin, upright old man with a cadaverous face and a long moustache that had been turned from grey to white by the post-war political events in Ireland, which are euphemistically alluded to by the inhabitants as "the Trouble."

The Irish rebellion had passed over the Bally Cavan estate without submerging it, but leaving a litter of unpleasantness behind. For years Sir Seymour had struggled with all the quiet reasonableness of his nature against the disrupting and hostile forces around him, and his luck had held. Bally Cavan House had not been burnt down. He was threatened but overlooked. He was accustomed to being overlooked. He had been overlooked at Harrow, overlooked during his brief service in the Army (on his father's death he had resigned as a subaltern) and he had spent the rest of his life being overlooked. Not through weakness of character, so much as because he wished to be. Lady Cavanagh was his complement and theirs had been a happy married life. They had fondly chosen each other long ago without passion or excitement and they had had no cause to regret it. Lady Cavanagh was a Scotchwoman of good birth, big boned and big featured, of strong and handsome physique. She was much liked by the country people who sometimes remarked about her that she was "a real plain lady"—this being a tribute to her breeding, not a reflection on her appearance which they admired, describing her as a "fine stand-up lump of a woman." She made no attempt to compromise with either time or nature. She boldly met age face to face, and age seemed to have fled before her leaving her in possession of her iron constitution, her strong white teeth, clear honest eyes and healthy red face. It was obvious that with any

ordinary luck her eightieth birthday would find her going with the best of them over the walls and banks of the country, and that her peremptory voice would still be heard raised in hearty greeting at the Meets of the local fox hounds.

Together Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh had managed with success their place and family. Although their daughter and their two eldest sons were now parents themselves, they were still under their mother's thumb, at any rate during their brief visits home. Their affectionate respect for her common sense and their fear of her downright censure had never diminished. Sir Seymour might be the family oracle but Lady Cavanagh was decidedly the voice.

Dan alone, though certainly as much in awe of his parents as his sister and his brothers were, did not quite seem to fit into the Cavanagh mould. Of course he was only nineteen and still growing up, but his parents were beginning to hope that his mental growing pains were not going to last too long.

This afternoon he was subdued. He was weak after a long régime of patent milk foods, dry toast and biscuits—all the dainty horrors of an invalid diet—the weather was bad and showed every sign of remaining so for the rest of the week—the future was uncertain and in the present he had nothing to look forward to but a long lamp-lit evening and an unequal struggle with a book that his mother had provided for him. Like many of his contem-

poraries of the same age and sex, he had not yet learnt to read except in the literal sense of the word. If he could be said to have any library preferences they lay in the direction of the sporting columns of the newspapers, or of stories concerning the heroic and uncomfortable doings of the Foreign Legion, which he read very slowly with knit eyebrows and heavy breathings that made his mother wonder whether he had a belated tendency to adenoids.

As for his calligraphy, it was about one degree of culture superior to that of his valiant twelfth century ancestors, who came over to Ireland with Strongbow, and when occasion demanded, signed their names with an X.

His parents, never very loquacious with their youngest son, seemed more than usually preoccupied this afternoon, but the silence which, Dan thought, had lasted rather a long time was finally shattered by a din in the hall.

It was the arrival of Aunt Maureen and Aunt Sophy, the two elderly Miss Cavanaghs who lived together in a low grey house the other side of the park. They had driven themselves over in their trap and were now divesting themselves of their dripping mackintoshes and galoshes, while they admonished the excited dogs in the hall to, "Down, sir! Where's your master, sir? Lie down, sir!"

Aunt Maureen had a loud, aggressive, well-bred voice that penetrated to the library, causing Sir Seymour to mutter, "There's Maureen and Sophy."

Upon which Lady Cavanagh said briskly, "Dan, ring the bell, please, for more tea." He did as he was told, and the next moment was being embraced in Aunt Sophy's ample arms. Aunt Maureen, who had never cared for kissing, contented herself with an abrupt, "Well, Dan, up again? About time too. I've come about that last setting of yours—Amy" —this to Lady Cavanagh whose fiery blue eyes glinted with the light of battle. She knew that her sister-in-law had come to complain of the recent transaction, and she meant to fight every inch of the disputed ground, as befitted one of the most successful hen-women in the County.

The question was politely but acidly discussed from every possible angle, and Aunt Maureen, being finally silenced by Lady Cavanagh's uncompromising firmness, turned her thoughts to other things.

Dan was conversing agreeably with Aunt Sophy when Aunt Maureen shot the question at him.

"Well, Dan, and now that you have recovered, what are you going to do next?"

He took a good stare at her, and answered blandly:

"Well, what about your giving me a job to look after your hens and see that mother doesn't do you down?"

Balked, she raised her voice, "I like to feel that people are going to *stay* with me before I take them into my employ."

Dan agreed, "Yes, I have been unlucky, haven't I? When I don't leave the job, the job leaves me."

He gave a loud and untimely laugh at his own witticism. Aunt Maureen bridled, "It's nothing to laugh at, my dear boy. You're becoming a by-word in the County!" Dan looked flattered. Aunt Maureen stared round and was pleased to see that Lady Cavanagh was looking seriously put out, and that Sir Seymour was trying to hide his annoyance under an air of judicial gravity.

Aunt Sophy said well-meaningly, "I don't think that it's any good talking about work yet. Cousin Henry's boy who had concussion was two years before he was allowed to open a book. You must feed Dan up, Amy, and see that he doesn't tire himself. Sybil says in her last letter that Cousin Henry's boy has never been quite the same since. He's trying to write a novel. His ideas won't come freely, and it's having a very irritating effect on his temper, poor fellow!"

Aunt Maureen remarked, "I don't think we need worry. I can't quite see Dan writing a book. One needs *brains* to write a book."

"Sheep's brains for some of them," retorted Dan with unaccustomed brightness; "I looked at a novel that Agatha had here the other day. The heroine was awful hot stuff. You see first of all there was an infant before she tripped up to the altar, father unknown, unless of course it was the fellow she was in the punt with on the first page. If so it was all pretty rapid as she'd only met him that afternoon, and then she struck and wasn't having any which upset the husband-bloke. Then she hopped in a

plane with another chap (*not* the punt chap) and on the last page, she was back again on the husband-bloke's hands with another infant on the way. If that's what the modern girl's like, I shall remain a bachelor."

He made this masterly synopsis with deliberation, even having the nerve to pause in the middle of it and knock out his pipe. His family sat round in a charmed circle of surprise and disapproval. Sir Seymour alone relaxed into a wry smile. The ladies were of the school of thought to whom all mention of sex was taboo, apart from the necessary allusions to the conjugal life of the farmyard. Frivolity in connection with these subjects was as unprecedented as it was unforgivable. "It left a nasty taste in the mouth."

Lady Cavanagh, who had flushed, was the first to speak. "That's enough, Dan! Those are not the sort of things that one jokes about." Aunt Maureen, after glaring at her nephew resumed the conversation in an unnaturally loud voice that testified to her abhorrence of his breach of decorum. Aunt Sophy tried to look oblivious of this incident and failed.

After a moment Lady Cavanagh said, "Dan, would you mind going to see if the post has come? There's a fire in the smoking-room if you want to sit there."

Aunt Maureen remarked pointedly, "Well, I hope when I next see you to hear that you're fixed up with a job. You must be tired of doing nothing."

Dan rose with alacrity and, followed by the dogs, disappeared from the room. He had no desire to remain in Aunt Maureen's company for a moment longer than was necessary. All his innate chivalry and devotion to the fair sex, of every age, could not make him swerve from his firm conviction that Aunt Maureen's very conception and birth had been a ghastly mistake.

After a moment's silence, during which Lady Cavanagh gave an interrogative glance at her husband, who signalled approval, she put down her knitting and addressed Aunt Maureen with quiet triumph.

"Dan is going abroad. We have got an excellent post for him in Sicily."

"Sicily! Impossible!" from Aunt Maureen.

"What, Amy dear, do you mean the island of Sicily?" asked Sophy in a voice of consternation.

"Where else could I mean? You have heard of my first cousin, Mary Power that was? She married a man called Arthur Wanstead. I haven't seen her since her wedding, but we have always kept up with each other. The Wanstead family have lived in Sicily for two hundred years. They are the largest owners of vineyards in the island. Naturally they are very wealthy people. They have offered to take Dan to learn the business, and he is to live with them in their villa outside Palermo. He is to start at £250 a year, with two months leave every three years, and of course the prospects are limitless. They take nothing but young Englishmen in the

firm. We are very fortunate in having secured the job for him."

Aunt Maureen was stunned by the unexpectedness of the news and infuriated at the secrecy with which her brother and sister-in-law had concealed their plans.

On recovering her mental equilibrium, she rapped out a series of questions.

"How does he like the idea?"

"He doesn't know."

"I shouldn't ask him."

"I mean that we haven't told him yet."

"What, you haven't told him yet?"

"No, Doctor Gallagher said that he wasn't to be excited while he was ill. We are telling him tonight."

"But Seymour, surely you don't want him to live abroad?"

"My dear girl, he must go where he can earn a living. I was out in India at his age."

"Yes, but India is British, you can't compare it to a Latin country. How do you fancy him being mixed up with foreigners, Amy?"

"The Wansteads are no more foreigners than you are, Maureen. . . . They speak languages fluently but they are Protestants and their sons are always educated in England. All the English visitors who pass through Sicily go to see them."

"He'll have to learn Italian I suppose?"

"Yes, he'll learn Italian when he gets there."

"How did you get the job for him?" Aunt

Maureen demanded aggressively. But to this she received no reply.

Aunt Sophy asked, "Have the Wansteads any nice sons for him to be friends with?"

"What about daughters?" inquired Aunt Maureen searchingly.

Lady Cavanagh snapped back, "A married son and two married daughters."

"When is he leaving and which route is he going by?"

"He leaves at the end of the month. He'll stay with Ronald and Dorothy at Portsmouth for a few days' visit, he's to take over that dinner-service that I promised Dorothy, and then he'll go to London for a week. He crosses by Dover-Calais, goes through Paris, gets the connection at Turin, has a day in Rome and catches the train that evening for Palermo. It's all quite simple. He is not obliged to spend the night anywhere on the way," she wound up with quiet satisfaction.

Sir Seymour added genially, "Yes, he leaves London at mid-day on a Monday say, and he gets to Palermo on the Thursday, some time in the afternoon."

"Well, this is all great news indeed," Aunt Maureen conceded ungraciously. "It's about time that things changed for the better. I'm sure that you've had enough trouble with the boy. I only hope that he'll be a success out there. He's so shockingly casual and irresponsible. However, we must hope for the best. He's certainly one of the

most addled-headed boys I've ever come across!"

"Of course, Maureen," commented Sir Seymour coldly. "You must remember that Dan is only nineteen. Some boys at his age have only just left school."

"Oh, yes, Seymour, I'm quite aware of that, but as it happens Dan left school a year and a half ago. Anyhow it's not his age but his attitude towards work that must be so disturbing for you and Amy. As Aunt Ina was saying the other day it really makes one wonder whether there *is* something wrong with our public schools!"

Aunt Sophy raised her voice in defence of her favourite nephew. "I'm sure he'll do well. Dear, dear boy! To think that he's leaving us to go to live among strangers and Roman Catholics. Aren't you afraid, Amy dear, that though your cousins are Protestants some priest might get hold of the boy? After all he's very young."

"No, I am not afraid. Dan has his faults, but all his ideas are extremely sound."

Aunt Sophy continued enthusiastically. "Oh, yes, he's growing into such a good-looking boy. Everybody loves him. He'll be very much missed, Amy. Lady Metcalf was saying only the other day when the accident took place, what wonderful charm he has."

"Unfortunately one can't live on charm," said Aunt Maureen tartly. "His great fault is that he is absolutely lacking in steadiness. So peculiar be-

cause your other two boys have done so well. Of course they are regular Cavanaghs. I've often wondered, Amy, whether he has taken after that great uncle of yours, Nicholas Taplow? He's exactly like that portrait of him as a young man, you've got in the smoking-room."

Lady Cavanagh was stung to the quick by having even the most unsatisfactory of her offspring compared to her own family ancestral black sheep who, amongst other misdeeds, had ruined the family property, eloped with a fifteen-year-old ward, was reputed by legend to have played dice with the devil and had died raving mad!

She got red again, and answered with the first display of real temper that she had allowed herself during the visit: "Dan like Nicholas Taplow! What a nonsensical idea!"

Sir Seymour, taking out his watch and winding it, tried to throw oil on the troubled waters by remarking:

"Ha, ha, you mustn't say that to Amy! That fellow is not a favourite of hers. When the picture was left to her, she only hung it up because it is a Lawrence."

"What a dear Dan would look in a blue coat with lace ruffles," said Aunt Sophy. But it was obvious even to Aunt Maureen that they had already outstayed their welcome, and shortly afterwards they took their departure.

Endowed as they were with that almost supernatural discernment that enables certain elderly re-

lations to pry so successfully into the affairs of their kinsfolk, the aunts Maureen and Sophy had no idea of the weeks of indecision and worry that Dan's parents had endured before bringing this affair to its happy termination. Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh had lain awake at night discussing the job from every point of view, moral, financial and climatic.

What effect, they had asked each other, would a prolonged sojourn in a Latin country have on one of Dan's years and flighty disposition?

It was a great plunge. But, as Sir Seymour had pointed out to his wife, there were several redeeming points to be considered. For one thing, the boy would be under the personal care of his Wanstead cousins. Anyhow he had been well brought up and was undoubtedly a high principled lad, though he had not always done himself justice in the past; and moreover it was definitely understood that if he secured the job and did well he was eventually to be transferred to the London office of the great firm of Wanstead and Binelli.

Then had come the sickening doubt as to whether Dan was going to secure the job after all, for there had been a temporary hitch in the proceedings. Sir Seymour had drawn out innumerable rough drafts of carefully-worded letters. There were episodes in his son's past that, though harmless enough in themselves, needed careful wording when transmitted to paper. At last everything was concluded satisfactorily. That very morning they had received a

charming letter from Arthur Wanstead himself, expressing his pleasure in being able to take Seymour and Amy Cavanagh's son into the firm. He enclosed a gracious little note from Mrs. Wanstead saying how glad she was that everything had been at last arranged, and that she was looking forward in June to welcoming the young cousin whom she had never seen. An enclosed snapshot showed her, an elegant middle-aged woman in white, sitting in the beautiful courtyard of the Villa Gardamancia against a background of orange trees, two stuck-up looking chow-dogs reclining at her feet. Even Lady Cavanagh who was not fanciful, had difficulty in visualising her youngest son successfully installed in these exotic surroundings.

The moment had now come to inform Dan of his fate. His parents hoped that the excitement that would be brought on by the news would not have a bad effect on him after his accident. They agreed that when all was said and done, the fact remained that he had had a serious smash. They had noticed that ever since his accident he had been inclined to dreaminess and melancholy. There was something thoughtful in his ingenuous, youthful glance that had not been there before. They wondered whether he was worrying about his future, and their hearts were touched. In their deep-rooted parental devotion they were more than willing to let the past bury Dan's past. They were eager to tell him of the promising future that was in store for him, and only waited to consult Doctor Gallagher

before doing so. He advised them to tell him without further delay, and hastened himself to spread the glad tidings round the county, so that the principal person concerned in it was one of the last people in those parts to hear the news.

Dan took the tidings with philosophical calm, removing his pipe from his mouth and remarking judicially, "It seems a pretty sound proposition, Father. Jolly good of you to have bothered about it. Of course I had rather it'd been a brewery, but I suppose that in time one'll get the taste for those light red wines. Anyhow it's better than a slap in the tummy with a wet fish."

Sir Seymour twirled his moustache and gave him a glance in which hope and doubt were painfully mingled.

II

LONDON

IT was a month later. Dan having completed his toilet, looked at his reflection in the long glass with quiet satisfaction. His morning coat, trousers and waistcoat of Bond Street cut, his natty black tie and the shining top hat which he held in his hand did full justice to his well set up figure and pleasing face.

The whole outfit, which was a little too large for him, belonged to his brother Ronald, with the exception of his shoes and a clean white handkerchief which he had tucked with care into his shirt sleeve. His appearance was so agreeably festive that he regretted not being able to sport a buttonhole as a finishing touch. This was unfortunately out of the question as the function that he was attending that day was a funeral. He wished that his Great-great uncle Leander Cavanagh was being married instead of buried, but he realised that he, Dan, was lucky, as the youngest and least important member of the family, to get the trip to the crematorium at all. He was to hire a car for the day, to take a handsome wreath with him and to stand himself a good luncheon and tea—all at the expense of his parents.

It was while he had been staying with his brother Ronald at Portsmouth that the order had come

through from Bally Cavan that someone was to represent the family at the obsequies of the lately deceased Great-uncle Leander. Alan was in hospital with a poisoned foot at York and Ronald, with quiet firmness, had refused to perform the task on the grounds that he could not get leave, and had transferred his rights as elder born to Dan, together with the loan of a morning get up, with brisk injunctions to return it without delay after the ceremony.

In spite of the melancholy nature of the occasion, Dan felt no depression. He had never seen his departed relation, and having, unlike the rest of the family, no monetary expectations from him, he saw no reason why he should not enjoy himself decorously on this lovely June day.

Giving himself a final brush down, he reflected that for the first time since his arrival, his appearance really was worthy of his dazzling and luxurious surroundings. His bedroom, with its silvered walls and green marble bathroom attached, was only one of the many surprises that the Hyde Hotel had given him. He felt that he would never forget his arrival there the day before. The new luggage with which he had been provided before leaving home had alone enabled him to face the gorgeous staff with a remnant of his usual composure. His first astonishment that this noble hotel should be the place that his parents were accustomed to patronise on their rare visits to London, had quickly subsided into gratification at finding himself living in such sumptuous style. He soon felt able to deal with the

waiters, but he was still overawed by the groups of supercilious beauties who sat drinking cocktails in the lounge hall, all day and nearly all night long. They had the effect of impressing and unnerving him. He felt that he could never hope to be at his ease in the society of such highly-finished and perfectly-poised specimens of the opposite sex, even supposing that he ever got to know them which was unlikely. They were a race apart from the hearty country girls with whom he had been brought up, or his larky acquaintances of what he now termed "my business days."

As he was taken swiftly down in the lacquered lift he wished with all his heart that Aunt Maureen could have seen him. Passing the cocktail beauties with more assurance than usual, and conscious that his appearance was attracting a certain amount of feminine attention, he nodded genially to the hall porter and stepped into the hired motor car hoping that he had not ordered it rather late. He looked at his new wrist watch and he saw that it was quite time to make a start.

He enjoyed the drive down through the countryside with its pines and bracken, and he thought commiseratingly of Great-uncle Leander. How flat to be dead on a day like this! The handsome wreath laid on the seat opposite to him seemed a poor compensation for leaving this sunlit and fragrant world. However the next world, he meditated (presuming that one managed to get into the right section) couldn't be too septic if this world, with its endless

delights, hunting over the winter fields, fishing in the peaty brown streams, shooting in the hushed autumn woods, was any criterion of what the righteous might hope for in the world to come.

He was surprised not to recognise any relations at the service, but then he had not met any of the Northumberland Cavanaghs, for years, and of course, he reflected modestly, they could hardly be expected to recognise their pallid little school-boy cousin in this lordly, top-hatted young man. He took his part in the service with suitable gravity, and after a colossal tea on the way home, sent a telegram to his parents, "Funeral passed off very satisfactorily, Dan."

It is doubtful whether Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh agreed with this summing up of the affair, when Aunt Maureen and Sophy arrived post haste, two days later with a copy of the *Daily Pictorial* showing on the front page a photograph of the funeral of the veteran actress, Miss Kate Barnaby, mother of the famous revue star, Miss Gladys Alvis. Among the chief mourners as they emerged from the church, could be seen Dan, top hat in hand, and with an expression of ready-made lugubriousness on his countenance. He was described as "Mr. Daniel Cavanagh of Bally Cavan House, Co.—great-great nephew of the deceased." It is true that Dan had himself provided the reporter with this information, but then how could he know that by arriving at the crematorium an hour late, he had attended the wrong service?

"Snips" Cadwalleder asked Dan again, "Why the devil don't you come? We'll have a whale of a run down through the Black Forest. The Gleitze's a perfect beauty, from all this chap in Berlin tells me. I'm to pick her up in Cologne. Look here! The trip won't cost you a penny. Denis Fowler said he'd come and then the ruddy ass let me down, and I've been looking for someone ever since to fill the spare seat and give me a hand if she breaks down. You're just the chap, and as you're heading for Italy anyhow, it just suits you. Look here! This is how we'll set about it. We'll fly to Cologne. I've got the tickets, and with luck we ought to do the trip to Naples in record time. The car's run in (thanks be!) You can get out at Naples (good for you!); I'm meeting a millionaire uncle there. He's worth a cool £6,000,000 if he's worth a half-penny stamp, and he's taking me and the Gleitze off in his yacht. For all I can hear, there's going to be a pretty hot crowd on board. That marvellous girl Peggy Banks'll be there! You've heard about my affair with that child, I suppose?"

"Snips" Cadwalleder evidently thought that the story bore repetition, as with the aid of a refilled glass he held forth on the subject for some time. He and Dan had run into each other in the hotel lounge the day after the funeral. Dan had not seen Cadwalleder since their public schooldays (he was not the type of friend that parents encourage their sons to keep up with), but evidence of his continued existence had reached Dan's knowledge via the police

and make me do an exhibition stunt on the ukulele every night for nothing, dash their cheek. I wasn't having any, and I cleared out after a colossal row. Of course they were pretty sick about it, but I didn't see myself performing gratis in her beastly band! All the same I don't want to drop them, so we might blow in there to-night and make my peace avec 'Ma.' But I can tell you there's going to be no marrying in it this time!"

Dan agreed that it would be a splendid way of spending the evening. He was in fact, in a beatific mood, when a burst of syncopation from the band prompted him to ask the question that was to prove so fatal to his peace of mind, "Is this place any good for dancing, Cad?" waving his cigarette towards the ballroom, which they could see through golden velvet curtains, and where a few couples were slithering round and round the polished floor. Cadwalleder answered, "Oh, no! I wouldn't go out of my way to hoof it here! Good place to bring a rich maiden aunt to. All the same," he added respectfully, "it's one of the best hotels in London for bed avec breakfast, and one of the most expensive too."

Dan stared at him, repeating slowly, "One of the most expensive, too?"

"Well, I call two guineas a night for a room fairly steep even if you don't."

Dan was too astonished to speak. His mind became a complete blank, and then a clammy apprehension urged him to his feet. Always the courteous host, he deposited the still boasting Cadwalleder in

the lounge, went into the hotel bureau, emerged holding a tariff list in his hand, and rushed upstairs.

Cadwalleder drifted to the bar. He was not the sort of young man who pays perfunctory visits to bars. He had once summed up his achievements in this line by informing a teetotal guardian that he was "definitely in the All England First Eleven of Pub Crawlers." Some time therefore had elapsed before he drifted back to the lounge.

Dan returned, coming out of the lift with a chastened expression on his countenance. He said brightly, "By the way, Cad, if that offer of yours still holds good, I'll come."

"What offer?" inquired the dazed young nobleman suspiciously.

"Going with you down to Italy in the Gleitze."

Cadwalleder gaped for a few seconds, then gave way to uncontrolled joy, "Marvellous! Good for you! We'll have a hell of a time! I was just going to phone up that Rigley fellow. He'd have been as much use as a sick headache on the trip."

He ordered a couple of whiskeys and sodas to celebrate the occasion.

He was not given to asking unnecessary questions, so Dan was spared the trouble of explaining the reason for his sudden change of plans.

After a feverish search upstairs in his room, he had eventually discovered in his sponge bag, a crumpled piece of paper upon which was written in Sir Seymour's handwriting, "Hyde Court Hotel,

Bloomsbury Square. Advise write for rooms in good time from Portsmouth."

Dan had never looked at this illuminating chit since first receiving it, he had not written for rooms from Portsmouth because he had had better things to do, he had told the taxi-man on arrival to drive to the "Hyde Hotel" because he imagined that he had an excellent memory. All very good reasons when looked at dispassionately.

Dan had then taken pencil and paper and made out the following calculations:

Father's Budget

	£	s.	d.
Hotel in London	5	0	0
Taxis & Amusements ..	1	0	0
Ticket to Palermo	9	0	0
Registering Luggage, food on Journey, Rome, etc. ..	5	0	0
Total	£20	0	0

N.B.—Journey from Ireland and G.G. Uncle L's show by separate cheque.

My Budget

	£	s.	d.
Hotel, 3 days	6	6	0
Food (including Cad's feed) ..	5	0	0
Taxis, Cinemas, etc	2	0	0
Total	£13	6	0

	£	s.	d.
	20	0	0
	13	6	0
Leaves	£6	14	0

With this £6 14 he had got to register his luggage and get to Palermo. "Hell!" he had remarked confidentially to the elegant green room. "Can't be done."

Having summed up his financial position, he had decided that there were two courses open to him. He could accept Cadwalleder's offer to motor to Italy or he could wire to his parents for more money, which meant confessing his unlucky mistake. This, he thought, would be a pity, for after all it was only yesterday that, top hat on head, he had represented the Cavanaghs at the interment of one of their most respected members. He had left Bally Cavan House with the congratulations and good-wishes of his relations and his friends ringing in his ears. During his brief visit to his naval brother and his wife, he had tasted the delights of their approval and encouragement. It would be bitter to lose at one fell swoop his newly-acquired dignity in the family circle. The thought of Aunt Maureen's unholy triumph when she heard of his latest slip had finally decided him to go down to Italy free of charge in Cadwalleder's Gleitze. His spirits rose at the prospect of seeing continental life in three countries at the rate of fifty miles an hour. As for his parents, he would wait till he got on Italian soil, when he would send the news by postcard that he had had a lift down to Italy in a racing car. He did not think that his change of plans would seriously delay his arrival at Palermo. Anyhow the Wansteads would

not mind his arriving a few days late as long as he let them know more or less in time.

When at 11.30 he and Cadwalleder strolled out together, with "Ma" Hunt's night club as their goal, he was happily settled in his conviction that everything turns out all right if only one keeps one's head and does not fuss. Life deals easily with those who take it easily, was his unformulated philosophy. Had not Aunt Maureen once nastily remarked, "He's a regular Larry-go-aisy." Well, the old lady was right for once. He intended to take things easy even down to his own funeral, which he hoped would be a regular old-fashioned one with every farmer's cart in the county following the hearse, plenty of liquid refreshments afterwards and, "No mourning by Sir Daniel Cavanagh's request." In the manner of younger sons, Dan had always liked the Biblical story of Joseph and his brethren. The ending had seemed to him a striking example of fair-play, and he occasionally thought of himself as coming into the baronetcy in the dim future, oblivious of the fact that this would entail a wholesale massacre of his nearest and dearest.

Turning lightly from death to life, Dan hung up his hat in the cloakroom of the Thousand and One Club. Two hours later found him dazed but happy. The welter of unlicensed drinks, the atmosphere rivalling that of a third class smoking carriage on the Continent, the effort of scrambling and swaying round the tiny raised floor, was reducing to pulp more experienced revellers than "the bog dweller

from Ireland," as Dan described himself to his first and last partner, a flashing girl with rolling dark eyes and dangling ear-rings, who had taken a demonstrative fancy to him, and had clung to him for the rest of the evening.

He was enjoying himself. His dancing at first had caused him secret qualms. He always seemed to be out of step with the band, or was it that the band was out of time with him? or was it that every time one got into the rhythm one fell over somebody's flat feet? Gripping his partner to him, he pushed her round the room with long-legged strides, oblivious of the furious glances thrown at him by more languid youths. His best friend would not have described his conversation as intellectual. All the same, his witticisms poured into his partner's willing ear, and punctuated by his loud spontaneous laughter at his own jokes, seemed to please. In spite of a whirling brain, he was never once reduced to the "Your turn to speak next. I'd hate to wake up a sleep walker," type of remark, which is the conversational small coin of the exhausted dancer. In spite of aching feet, he never joined the drear company who sat in a fatigued condition on divans, contemplating their glasses, looking at their wrist watches and yawning at their partners, "One more little drink, and then I must totter off to my virgin cot." He had in fact stayed the course on the occasion of his first visit to a night club, and he felt all the better for it. His partner, at about 3 A.M. paid tribute to his stamina by murmuring up at him,

"I say, you are a scream. I like the way you hold a gurl. Most of the boys nowadays seem to crumble to pieces in one's arms. A gurl does like to feel she's a gurl!"

Except for an occasional, "Cheerio! How's life?" he had exchanged very little conversation with Cadwalleder, though he had noticed that he was dancing again and again with a pretty girl, who he learnt was Miss Pearl Hunt. Dan, not being a patron of the Thousand and One Club, did not realise that his friend was foundering again in the quicksands of the Hunt family. He could only remember afterwards that Cad had reeled up to him at four o'clock, had handed him a flying ticket for Croydon Aerodrome, and had yammered at him, "Look here! Pearl's driving me back to breakfast at their what do you call it on the river, so here's the chit for the plane. Meet me there the day after to-morrow . . . no at least to-morrow I mean, isn't it? When is it, Pearl? Anyhow it's on the thing. I'll phone you to-night, old chap—Bless you!" Miss Pearl Hunt standing by his side, looking as fresh as a primrose, gave Dan a brisk sweet smile, said kindly, "Come along, Caddy, you poor kid. You're tired out. What you need is a mother's care," and led him away by the arm.

Dan passed through the silent streets of a London, weird in the dirty green light of dawn, and reached his hotel in safety. He brushed his brother's top hat carefully and solemnly with a silk handkerchief for a quarter of an hour, after which

solitary sign of his participation in the delights of "Ma" Hunt's establishment, he went to bed.

The remainder of the day, when he finally rose to greet it, was spent in yawning, packing, and finally with a supreme effort of will-power, registering and dispatching his heavy luggage to Palermo. He kept a small suitcase for immediate use and decided to travel comfortably in an old pair of grey flannel trousers, his navy blue blazer, a dilapidated trench coat, and an old and trusty soft hat. His school tie and one of his new shirts would he hoped pull together his otherwise undressy get-up.

After dinner he paid the bill. Though partially prepared for its contents, the shock that he received left him pensive for the rest of the evening. As he sat in a corner of the smoking-room pulling away at his pipe, he meditated placidly on the vicissitudes of this mortal existence and his heart was filled with quiet gratitude for the lucky chance that had brought Cad into his life at one of its most embarrassing junctures. (By the bye, the fellow had never rung up.) He was thankful that he had not been obliged to inform his parents of the unfortunate way in which his travels had commenced. Blessed laziness that had caused him to send them no word from London, beyond a couple of telegrams!

He was genuinely anxious to turn over a new leaf and to justify his parents' championship of him in the face of serried ranks of critical and deprecating relations. Now, with ordinary luck and a little mild deceit, which after all was not hard for one who

combined strong histrionic talents with a rooted dislike of hurting people's feelings, there seemed no reason why the whole misadventure should not be veiled in mystery for all time, unless, perhaps in years to come, when he was a successful merchant-prince, he told his father and mother of the wonders of the Hyde Hotel. With these soothing thoughts as company, he retired to an early bed.

III

IN THE AIR

AN official at Croydon Aerodrome handed Dan a telegram. "Unavoidably delayed go on Cologne Kronhof Hotel will follow to-morrow Cad." Dan raised his eyebrows, said "H'm. That's all right," and strolled across to the aeroplane. The other passengers had already taken their places. There was a tall, saturnine young man and a pretty black-haired girl—a honeymoon couple. Dan knew that they were a bride and bridegroom because he was at once told so by a fat, smartly-dressed, elderly woman who more than occupied the seat on his left. Leaning across the gangway, she breathed in his ear, "Honeymooners, poor young things!" Dan who felt keenly for the embarrassment of others, looked round quickly and was relieved to see that a pair of empty seats divided them from the young couple, who anyhow were gazing blissfully into each other's eyes.

"Going to Cologne?" the lady continued, giving him a gracious smile over her womanly frontage. He nodded with reserved politeness. Impressed as he was by her stylish appearance and commanding manner, he did not feel that he wanted to be

mothered, and his instinct told him that to mother him was her intention. He decided that if he was to be picked up by strangers when travelling, he preferred somebody younger and less rotund.

The plane took off with a deafening whirr, and conversation became impossible.

Dan turned to the window and gazed down spell-bound at the rapidly-diminishing world. He was excited to see suburbs, fields, villages and towns scuttle away beneath him. He felt god-like! A peremptory tap on his shoulder brought him back to solid reality. His neighbour was pointing imperiously with a well-gloved hand at her fat ankles and then at her crocodile skin suitcase which lay between them. A bunch of keys, attached to an antique ring was thrust into his hand and the next moment he was lurching over the suitcase, and wrestling with its finicky lock. The plane had begun to rock slightly. Dan still felt normal, but did not particularly fancy the idea of remaining for too long in a bending position. He rummaged feverishly among the neatly-packed contents and fished out a pair of snow boots which he deposited on her lap. He subsided back in his seat, but she was making more signs, and to his dismay, he saw that she was expecting him to help her on with them. He hoped miserably that the honeymoon couple were not watching him as he struggled to force her thrust-out feet, shoes and all, into the boots, but he need not have worried. At that moment the plane dropped into an air pocket, the honeymoon couple were sick and Dan rolled

onto the lady's lap. As she helped him with plump, jewelled hands to regain his seat, she shouted heartily in his ear, "I can see that you aren't used to looking after ladies. You're a dreamer. Artist's hands," she added, yelling at him above the roar of the engine; patted his fingers and heaved back into her chair.

Dan lay back with closed eyes, taking no further interest in the skyscape around him, or in the scudding world beneath him. A feeling, first of depression and then of nausea invaded him. He had just reached that pitch of dejection when the most colossal catastrophe would have left him unmoved, when he felt another tap on his arm, and was offered an envelope, which he waved indignantly away. He made no reply to her shout of, "You're going to be ill. Take it!" His politeness and conversational powers had deserted him. He was sinking into an unspeakable abyss. Undaunted she screamed, "Here, smelling salts! Better take them, I don't want them."

He availed himself of her offer, and in a few seconds had recovered. But he would never forget the mortification of those agonising moments. Smelling salts! Shades of his great grandmother! And from such a woman. At that moment he hated her for her obviously iron digestion. The plane by now was steadier. He raised his voice, "Can't think why I felt so rotten. I've crossed the Irish channel umpteen times—never been sick yet." She smiled, indulgent and unconvinced, shook her importantly-

hatted head, and began to do her accounts. Her pencil broke and Dan had to sharpen it. She then handed him her accounts for him to verify. He was nonplussed. He hated thinking about money once it was spent, and Lady Cavanagh's insistence on his keeping a monthly account of his allowance had only strengthened his dislike of having to make a financial confession on paper. He had, as a matter of fact, a very special and private system of cooking accounts, which he had once evolved during a Latin lesson at school, and had perfected in after life, but he felt that the definite rhythm of the aeroplane was not conducive to chartered accountancy. He glanced over the column of figures, put a spidery tick against it, gave it back and closed his eyes.

She handed him an aluminium box. He reluctantly opened it, and began to unwrap small packets of biscuits and sandwiches. She indicated to him to eat, but he hesitated, realising that once he had partaken of this woman's food he would be placed almost in the position of a nephew. He knew what this meant. He finally succumbed to a small silver flask of brandy that she pressed on him, and the next thing was that she had given him a visiting card, upon which he read,

The Hon^ble^ Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly,
119 Thurloe Square,
London.

and underneath in pencil, "Shall we introduce ourselves? Write your name here."

He chewed a pencil for a few moments while he wondered miserably whether a fictitious name would be of any help. Finally he wrote more illegibly than usual, "D. De L. Cavanagh, Ireland."

"Are you related to the Northumberland Cavanaghs?" she shrieked above the drone of the aeroplane. He smiled with purposeful vagueness and pretended not to hear. She persisted. "Of course you must be. When I was a girl, I knew dear Simon Cavanagh well. Such a handsome man." Her voice gave way and she wrote on an envelope. "One of my dance partners. Very charming. I haven't seen him for years. He married a very delicate wife. How is he?"

Dan summoned up all his strength and bellowed at her, "DEAD!"

She sank back and cast her eyes up with an expression of emotion. Dan penitent, tried to distract her attention by pointing out a large Belgian town which they were passing over. She brightened up and produced a little map out of her handbag.

From that moment till the time that they arrived at Cologne, the map was in constant use. She insisted on continually verifying their bearings on it, and refused to believe him when he laboriously marked out their route in pencil. He began to think that she would never be convinced of the position of the various towns that he pointed out to her, unless she was actually dropped out of the plane into their market places. He was learning to appreciate

all, or nearly all the uses to which a really womanly woman can put a young man in an aeroplane.

He wished that fate had marked out for him the rôle of knight errant to the bride who by now was languidly sniffing eau de cologne, and whose big dark blue eyes met his glance when he turned round, with the gaze of an injured baby. She was being ignored by her newly-acquired husband who, sullen and sallow, was sitting hunched up with his back half turned to her. Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly, catching Dan's roving look, wrote on a piece of paper, which she thrust into his hand, "Great mistake to start on a honeymoon flying. When we land, I will tell you some curious stories that have come to my knowledge apropos of bad starts in marriage."

Though he agreed with her views on aerial honeymoons (he had already decided to spend his own honeymoon on what he described as "terra cotta") and would dearly have liked to have heard the curious stories, he was so alarmed at the promise of further acquaintanceship that he tried to shake her off once and for all by writing back rudely, "Much better leave everybody to look after themselves." She seemed amused by this idea and smiled at him affectionately before writing, "A regular boy's idea. Unfortunately one can't. We are all put into the world to help one another." That explained the last two hours, he thought grimly. She offered him the pencil, but he waved it away. He did not want to go on playing this aerial drawing-room game. Anyhow he had no further views on the subject.

The plane descended. Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly shrieked, and a few moments later they were racing across the aerodrome. When they came to a standstill Dan put on his hat, lifted it and hurried out of the plane. Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly had informed him that she was going to take a taxi to her hotel and offered to share it, but he refused courteously and firmly. He was devoutly thankful to have seen the last of his flying stable mate.

IV

COLOGNE

MRS. DELACEROIX-ROLLY leant heavily on Dan's arm and groaned, "Oh, my poor feet! How I suffer. But all my life I've had to struggle with my body."

He nodded. That was all right for her, but he did not see why he also should have to struggle with her body, especially in this weather. The heat of the July sun was beating down on the Dom-Kloster and his one lucid idea at the moment was to manœuvre his weighty companion into the cool of the Cathedral, where he could deposit her on a chair, rest his aching arm and mop his brow.

It was three hours since they had set out from the hotel. An hour of shopping, two hours of sightseeing.

First of all they had walked the length of the Hohe Strasse and she had dragged him on to shop after shop where she had haggled in execrable German. Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly was a shopper who flitted like an elephantine butterfly from counter to counter, and was unconsciously responsible for a good deal of incipient hysteria among the employees of the shops that she patronised. Her technique in

making purchases was well-illustrated by a trivial but painful incident which left Dan feeling, in his own words "somewhat hot and bothered." She was looking for an imitation pearl necklace, confiding to Dan as they entered the shop, that she always left the Delaceroix-Rolly pearls at the bank when she travelled, "because foreigners were so dishonest." Assisted by a good-humoured shop girl, she commenced a thorough investigation of the little stand, draped with imitation jewellery, that stood on the counter, and half an hour later she was still investigating. This necklace had no clasp, this one with a clasp was too short, this longer one with a clasp was not the right shade, this one that was the right shade had no clasp either. All the other necklaces were composed of ungraduated pearls and were therefore out of the question. From time to time she asked Dan, who was fidgeting about in the background, "Do you like this one? Does this suit me? Oh, dear, am I too old to wear pink pearls? What do you think? What do you think?" Finally she exclaimed in loud, indignant tones, "What a poor selection. Dear me! we've not been very lucky in our shopping so far, have we?" She gave a look of distaste at the glass counter which by now was littered like the floor of Aladdin's cave with synthetic gems, gave an injured sigh, and said, "Oh, well, after all people aren't wearing pearls much now, are they? Come on, my dear boy, we'll go and look for postcards."

Dan glanced with apprehension at the irritated

shop girl. He could not believe that this was the end. Surely she was not going to walk out calmly without buying anything? He did not know that Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly was an expert in sterile shopping. The girl, seeing that she was preparing to move heavily away, flushed with annoyance and called a shop-walker.

Dan scenting a row seized his companion's arm and bundled her out into the street. He was filled with shame and ventured to remark severely, "I say, I think they were getting pretty fed up with us in there!"

She retorted testily: "My dear boy, I was shopping before you were born. You don't understand the mentality of these people. After all it's their business to attend to us. We're not there for their benefit, I should *hope*." Then patting his arm kindly, "You've got a lot to learn in life, especially about women." He did not feel that he wished to study the psychology of the female sex at the moment, and longed to leave her, but he could not see his way to doing so. He trailed after her gloomily into several other shops and she had soon strung him with parcels like a Christmas tree. Then with the help of a guide book they had wended their way to the church of St. Gerion to see the martyrs' skulls. From thence to the Ring Strasse and down to the embankment of the Rhine. "Very disappointing," she had observed disapprovingly. Dan wondered what she had expected to see. He himself had only expected to see a river and he had seen it.

Back again to the Church of the Apostles, and into the market place where, with excruciating deliberation, she had bought bagfuls of plums. This was the only purchase that Dan had taken any genuine interest in, and to his chagrin he promptly spilt most of them on the cobbles, calling forth from Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly the remark, "I must try and train you for matrimony. You wouldn't make a very good husband at present, would you?"

"Can't say that I've got any ambitions that way. I'd rather be a co-respondent any day," blustered Dan with unwonted temper, as he grovelled for the fallen fruit. He had listened and answered politely throughout the wearisome morning while she gave him advice about the dangers of life, the management of women, and the mysteries of love. Now with a supreme effort of will and muscle, he hauled her up the steps of the cathedral and with a firm, "I've got to do some sightseeing of my own now, you'll be all right here, won't you?" left her gasping on a chair and fled to the nearest beer-shop.

Gulping down draughts of clear, golden beer, he wondered how he could have been such a fool as to have allowed himself to be snaffled by a lady, whom by now he thought of as "a poisonous old frump." He did not realise that a virtuous widow of forty years standing, has by the nature of things, an incalculable advantage over a young bachelor of nineteen ill-spent summers.

Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly had, as it happened, long ago brought to a fine point the art of making young

people of both sexes fag for her. Her motherly figure, despotic yet kindly nature, social position and influence gave her a hold over all but the most unruly of her young friends. She had no children of her own—an omission which she put down to the account of the very late Major Delaceroix-Rolly, who had inconsiderately died two months after marriage. His widow had acquired, in consequence, the set habits of a wealthy celibate combined with the confidence of a prosperous married woman.

But how could Dan guess all these hidden forces that had helped to bring him into servitude? He cursed himself for being such an unutterable mutt, and ordered more beer. He knew that his widowed companion might be waiting for him in the sanctified gloom of the cathedral but he did not care. He realised glumly that since falling into the clutches of Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly, he was rapidly losing that natural breeding, that combined with his occasionally lordly manner had once induced Aunt Sophy to dub him playfully, "The Duke of Bally Cavan." He decided that one would have to be in training for the World's Heavy Weight Championship to compete with Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly either morally or physically. Thus salving his conscience he slunk back to the hotel, his hat pulled well over his eyes, and resolved to avoid the good lady till Cad's arrival that afternoon.

The afternoon came but no Cad came with it. Dan paid an unprofitable visit to the aerodrome, returning to the hotel to inquire whether a telegram

had arrived for him. By five o'clock he was beginning to get worried. He had no idea of his friend's address, and now that he came to think things over, no particular reason for having confidence in his friend's reliability. He was sitting disconsolately in the lounge turning over the pages of an illustrated German newspaper, and trying to grapple with the situation, when Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly sailed out of the lift, and towards him. She had changed into a frock of wine-coloured crêpe de chine and a smart, glittering toque. Disposed over her person in strictly fashionable order were a handsome artificial flower, two long chains, a diamond brooch, a black moire throat-band, lorgnettes, a bracelet and three fine rings. She presented such a modish and yet matronly appearance that Dan's determination to extricate himself from her motherly grip, went under as though before a tidal wave. She beamed at him, "Well, there you are! What happened to you this morning? I was looking for you everywhere. How ungallant of you to leave a lady sitting all by herself in a strange cathedral! Do you know that just after you left me, a horrid-looking man came up and sat down beside me and tried to get into conversation with me. However I said 'Police' three times and that frightened him away."

Dan mumbled apologetically, "I'm awfully sorry. But perhaps the fellow was a guide."

"No! quite the reverse! However there was no harm done, so I won't scold you. But I don't know if you'll be very successful with the ladies if this is

how you are going to behave. Well now, I've got a nice surprise for you. I thought that one oughtn't to be in Germany without hearing a little music, so I took all the trouble to find out what was on to-night at the opera house, and I've secured with great difficulty the last two seats for one of Wagner's pieces—the Valkyrie. The one about the flying horse-women. Two seats for you and me. It's very fine, I believe. Curiously enough, though I've travelled a great deal, and at one time had a box at Covent Garden, I've only heard two of Wagner's pieces, 'Lohengrin' and 'Aïda.' "

Dan received this curious piece of musical information respectfully. He was impressed by her culture, but was resolved not to share in it. He answered very politely that it was awfully kind of her to have thought of him, but that he was expecting a friend from England at any moment now.

"What train is he coming by?"

"Well—er—aeroplane . . . as a matter of fact."

"Oh, but surely there are no more aeroplanes arriving to-day?"

He fenced desperately. "I believe there is one about sixish."

"We'll soon find out." She beckoned to the hall porter who came with obsequious haste, and on being questioned, assured her that her assumption was correct.

She turned to Dan, triumphant and suspicious, "Well, that's quite clear. You're a very impractical young man, aren't you? However, you'll learn in

time. We'll have a nice little dinner here, don't you think? and then hey, ho! for the opera!"

Something about her enthusiasm melted his sulky heart. "After all it was awfully decent of her and well-meaning and all that."

He thanked her again and gave her one of his friendliest grins.

Whatever divergent opinions may be held in the world of modern music concerning the genius of Wagner, there can be no doubt that from a philistine's point of view, he gives more value for money in respect of sheer audibility than most known composers.

Dan sat stunned beside Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly as the orchestra unrolled the thunderous themes, his first coherent thoughts on Wagner being to the effect that during the louder parts one might shout at the top of one's voice without anyone turning a hair. It was amazing to him that any single body of men could produce such a tremendous volume of sound on musical instruments.

As the curtain went up and the music lulled to a single motif, he remarked in a loud whisper to his companion, "Gosh! What an effort for the band!" To his indignation a family party in the next row turned, man, woman and child and hushed him to silence. Dan's temper rose. Accustomed as he was almost exclusively to the silent films, he would have liked to have pointed out to the attacking forces in

front that an occasional whispered comment was a legitimate part of a theatrical entertainment.

Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly heaved sideways and breathed loudly and slowly in his ear. "You mustn't talk at the opera. Not done. These Germans very particular."

They evidently were particular, thought Dan, as this time the whole house was hissing at them, or so it appeared to his heated imagination. Abashed, he concentrated his attention on the shadowy stage. As far as he could make out, there was a married couple, both enormously stout and proportionately hefty in the vocal chords, living and singing together in a draughty sort of cave-farmhouse, or what not. There was a storm on, and another chap rushed in wet through, or obviously supposed to be. Actually his flaxen wig was as dry as a bone, as Dan verified through a pair of opera glasses which Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly had thrust into his hand to keep him quiet. This newcomer was a rather beastly-looking fellow with bare podgy legs and a leopard's skin slung round him. In Dan's opinion he was an even worse sight than the husband (who had faded out into the storm) because he was younger and therefore might be expected to keep himself in better condition. After all if singing didn't give him time for exercise, he ought to take Turkish baths. However, the fat lady fell for him good and hearty and gave tongue. Then the filthy bloke gave tongue, and just as Dan thought that he was never going to shut up, she joined in and they gave tongue together,

in what he proudly recognised as being a duet for tenor and soprano.

He was gradually sinking into a mental coma when the couple made a bolt for it through the door. He sat up all attention, and when the curtain finally went down on the act, turned to Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly and said, "Jolly nice. Do you know what the story is about?"

"It's all here. I bought a little book in English all about it. I'll tell you in a moment. I must refresh my memory. Ah . . . yes . . . they're brother and sister. These two that have just eloped together. Their father is Wotan, a god of sorts . . . there is going to be trouble."

Dan's eyebrows shot up with mingled horror and delight. "I should jolly well think so. Brother and sister! I say I have brought you to a hot show!"

The first time that the music itself actually penetrated to his consciousness was when the Valkyries swept onto the stage. He was so much stirred by the wondrous motif of their Ride that his very pulse seemed to quicken. He felt lifted above himself—he wanted to stand up and sing with them at the top of his voice. When the rhythm of the titanic galloping had died down, he took a deep breath and inspected Brunhilda through the opera glasses. As a woman, he decided, she fell short. She had on a Rule Britannia get-up, flowing robes, a long red wig, and a sort of fireman's helmet, and as she sang she thumped the stage with a spear. She was even larger than the woman in the cave,

who, at any rate when one closed one eye, thereby cutting her into two sections, was possible, if not easy to look at. This female was only fit for a travelling show, in Dan's opinion. Actually she was one of the three great Brunhildas of the operatic world and Cologne was fortunate in hearing her.

After what Dan classified as "yoddlings" on the part of everybody, the incestuous brother and sister were, quite rightly, struck dead by an old buffer who appeared roaring from behind a rock, to the accompaniment of some very classy thunderings and lightnings. By this time the Fat Lady had also staggered onto a rock and she and the old gent, who he gathered was Papa Wotan, had a good set-to and fairly boomed at each other. A regular family row!

By the *entr'acte,* Dan had just enough strength left to mutter, "D'you mind if I go and have a drink?" and to go off barwards in search of beer.

The final act which seemed to him to be interminable, made little impression on his bemused ears and brain. He looked round and felt vague surprise at seeing the unwearied attention of the intense faces around him. "Gosh! they're enjoying it," he thought wearily. By his side Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly slept peacefully.

His last clear impression of the Valkyrie was that for some reason or other the colossal maiden who answered to the name of Brunhilda, had been kindly but firmly put to sleep by her pa on a slab of rock—and much less offensive too she looked

when laid out on her back. Old Wotan then lit a sort of magic gas ring round her and hopped it. The scene now reminded Dan of the large Christmas pudding encircled with flaming brandy that made its annual and welcomed appearance at the Bally Cavan House family dining table.

On their way home in a taxi, Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly and Dan were both too exhausted to converse very much. He pulled himself together and thanked her for his enjoyable evening. Mrs. Delaceroix-Rolly murmured, "Very fine and artistic the whole thing, I thought. Very fine—so like life. Reminded me of my poor younger sister and her unfortunate love affair—only of course that was not incestuous. In that case I played the part of Brunhilda. Ah! and I suffered, I suffered for it too. I'll tell you about it some time because it will help you on your way through life. Sex is a great mystery—the more one knows the less one seems to know. We'll have a long talk to-morrow."

Dan, suppressing a somnolent yawn thought otherwise.

Cad was bound to arrive next morning and then they would soon be licking up the miles in the Gleitze.

Next morning as it happened, Dan was sitting in deep dejection in a third class railway carriage bound for Wiesbaden. As he had come away from Cologne without any reading matter, he drew out of his pocket book and perused once again, a telegram form—"Trip cancelled married Pearl this

morning stop awfully sorry would offer Gleitze but not buying it now stop Pearl advises Pelikan night-club Cologne for real good time give Ma Hunts name best wishes from us both Cad."

This message had caused Dan indescribable consternation when he had received it that morning. After an hour of acute worry, during which he had sat gloomily on the edge of his bed smoking a pipe, he had impulsively decided to make his way down to Italy, travelling, third, fourth or any other class that the German State Railways cared to offer him, and when his money showed signs of running seriously short, to anchor himself in some humble "pub" and send an S.O.S. to Bally Cavan imploring for funds to be wired to him. The further south that he could travel before doing this the better. Anything, even Switzerland, would sound more decent in a telegram than admitting brazenly that he was sitting in Cologne waiting for money. Aunt Sophy herself (she had once asked if Australia and New Zealand were not joined together) could not imagine that Cologne was on the direct route to Sicily, and he had neither the time, the cash nor the inclination to explain in a wire how he had winged his way to the banks of the Rhine. Having thus cut the Gordian knot of his difficulties, Dan had refused to contemplate the possible consequences of his decision. He could not for the life of him think of any other solution and he clung to this one with all the tenacity of a reckless nature at bay.

Now as the train rumbled along the handsome,

spinach-coloured banks of the famous river, Dan recovering from the first shock caused by Cad's unwarrantable behaviour felt apprehensive but exalted. After all, he was setting forth on an unknown journey in a country whose language he would never attempt to speak, with the sole object of sparing his parents' feelings as far as possible. He had done the right thing. He felt that he was like the chap in the poem whose head was unbowed but bloody.

The latter word made him think once more with slow anger of Cadwalleder. It was the most complete let-down that he had ever experienced or heard of. He could only imagine that Cad had been forcibly kidnapped by the Hunt family and dragged to the altar, or was it registrar's office? He had seemed such a good fellow, though of course now he came to think of it, Cad had always been considered an awful little oike at school. The child-Cad was evidently father to the man-Cad. It was a great disappointment, and Dan wondered uncomfortably whether he was too easily taken in by people, too anxious to believe that everybody was perfect. He had always thought that it was less trouble to take a blindly optimistic view of life, but now he was beginning to wonder whether it did not lead to more worry in the long run. Could it be that his indulgence towards himself and others was not Christian forbearance so much as laziness and disinclination to face facts? However, it was a waste of time, he considered, to mope over oneself,

and only led to a fit of the blues, and a feeling as though it were Sunday.

It was difficult to think about anything under the circumstances. He had never known anything to equal the heat of the railway carriage. The sun beat down through the window panes and the air was so thick with smoke and smells that it was only fit in his opinion for the lungs of white mice. He was squeezed in between a buxom young matron, nourishing a baby, which made him feel shy, and a perspiring, sausage-eating individual with a cropped head and a green felt hat with a feather in it, who made him feel sick. Masses of children, guttural voices and hard wooden benches. He thought, "Gosh! This is a jolly way of seeing the Continong. Wish I had on padded trousers and a gas mask."

As there was only one window half open, he emulated the neighbours and took off his coat. Yet everyone else seemed to be enjoying themselves. Their progress along the banks of the Rhine was calling forth loud cries of admiration. As the train breasted each ruin, a couple of students sang the appropriate ballad, and once in a fervour of musical emotion the entire carriage joined in a chorus.

Dan had hardly got over his astonishment at this harmonious demonstration, when he became the unwilling centre of all eyes. A plump little girl, who looked as if she were bursting out of her muslin frock, tried to climb on his knee, offering him a

piece of cake and lisping, "Onkel, Onkel." He playfully but firmly held her off by one of her tight flaxen plaits upon which she burst into howls of frustrated affection. Hostile glances were directed at him from all sides, and he felt that the moment had come to make a move.

It was a corridor train. He struggled past several more third class carriages packed with hot family parties, and found himself in the quieter region of the second class, whose denizens read their illustrated papers among their respectable hand luggage. He stood looking out of the window, and wondered who all the "old blighters" had been, who had lived in the castles that he caught glimpses of, as the train wound its way past vineyards and woods. If he had only known that he would be passing this way, he would have asked his sister-in-law Dorothy for information. She was very keen on history. By the way, his parents would be glad to know that he was doing such a lot of sightseeing. Then he remembered! To-day was the appointed day on which he ought to have been leaving London. No, they would not be glad! He was sightseeing on the wrong part of the map.

Anyhow, he consoled himself, things were not as bad as they might have been, as he had four days' grace, and provided that his money lasted reasonably well, he could get a long way south in four days. He would sleep that night at the smallest hotel that he could find, and then go on to Switzerland.

Suddenly he heard a pretty feminine voice raised in protest, first in German and then in English. The pretty voice was drowned by a loud, masculine voice. Dan turned quickly. There were two people in the carriage behind him. A German student, his face elongated with indignation under his peaked cap, was glowering at a girl, who was holding a window open with both hands. She was an attractive girl, well-made and slight, with a promise of vigour and height in her still immature figure. "Why don't you go to another carriage if you're afraid of a draught?" she asked the student in bad German, her eyes sparkling with the classic indignation of the Briton abroad who is being denied fresh air. With an expressive growl that only a Teutonic throat could have managed, he seized his overcoat from the seat and stretched up to get his heavy satchel of books from the rack. The next moment there was a piercing scream, his angry movement having inadvertently brought the bag down on the girl's uncovered head. She sank down on the seat, and clutched at her forehead moaning. Dan rushed impetuously in and seized the student by the arm shouting, with unnecessary violence, "Swinehund!" (one of the few German words that he knew) "Apologise to her!" There was a slight scuffle. The girl jumped up addressing them alternately in German and English. "He thought you'd done it on purpose! He didn't do it on purpose! Don't have a row, please! He'll call the conductor." This was exactly what the student intended to do, but the

train crawled at that moment into a station that happened to be his destination, so seizing his belongings he bounced out onto the platform, shouting his opinion of the English race as he went. It was one of those incidents that do not help to further the aims of the League of Nations.

As the train moved out of the station, Dan and the girl looked at each other and burst out laughing. Then with the air of a distressed maiden thanking a knight errant she said, "I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't come. He was simply odious! I only wanted to open the window a bit more after all."

Dan, with the air of one who has travelled from China to Peru told her authoritatively, "I'm afraid that you'll find them the same all over the Continent."

"Are they?" she asked respectfully. "This is my first trip abroad. I suppose that you've travelled a lot?"

"I'd better introduce myself," replied Dan facetiously, ignoring the question. "My name is Daniel De L. Cavanagh. I come from Ireland."

She appeared a trifle fluttered by this lordly young man and his noble sounding appellation. She was secretly glad to be able to inform him that her name was "Fiona Gilchrist" and that she came from Argyleshire. She had a deep-rooted, silent pride in her Scotch ancestry, all the more stubborn because she was of an unpretentious nature.

Dan decided that she was an attractive little thing.

She had slim legs and neat ankles. Her tawny-brown eyes were bright and soft, she had a small nose, and a generous well-shaped mouth. Her cheeks were childishly smooth and the colour of a pale brown egg, fresh laid. Her hair, brown like peat smoke, was short, straight, and cut in a fringe, giving her such a juvenile appearance that Dan thought patronisingly that she could only just have left school.

"Aren't you rather young to be travelling alone? How old are you?" he asked her with the unctuousness of an inspector for a Society for the Protection of Young Females.

"Well, as it happens—I was seventeen yesterday," she answered with reserve, eyeing him sideways. He held out his hand. "Well then, show me your birth certificate, please." She coloured up, and asked with spirit, "Oh. You are trying to be funny?"

"Oh, no! I make a habit of collecting ladies' birth certificates. I've got hundreds of them framed, hanging round my room! How old do you think I am?"

She looked at him, liked him, guessed his real age, but with instinctive feminine flattery hazarded "About twenty-five?"

"Well, that's not a bad shot," replied the untruthful Dan, much gratified. He now thought her not only attractive but intelligent. A moment later he thought her also womanly and sympathetic. She had produced a luncheon basket, and was urging

him politely to share its contents with her. He was preparing to refuse, but a rapid glance satisfied him that there was more food there than a young virgin could possibly need, and he fell to without further delay.

He was reminded of a less pleasing impromptu meal with a lady, and said conversationally, "What route did you come by? Did you stay the night in Cologne? I flew. It's far and away the best way of travelling."

"I've always longed to, but it's very expensive, isn't it?"

"Not really," munched Dan, who, not having had to pay for his aeroplane ticket, naturally connected no particular idea of expense with this mode of transit. He went on a trifle sententiously, as he demolished a hard-boiled egg. "After all, one doesn't travel every day of one's life. By the way, there's no salt is there? Never mind. Yes, one may as well do it comfortably while one's about it. As for the expense, it does come a trifle more, but nothing to write home about."

This unhappy metaphor, combined with the sight of a bristling conductor passing down the corridor, brought Dan with a crash to earth. He paused, egg in hand. "Good Lord!" he said slowly, "I'd quite forgotten. I'm afraid I must leave you. The fact is I'm travelling third class."

She was silent for a moment, then, quickly, "Oh, I'm sorry. Must you go?"

"Well, I think I'd better go while the going's

good. Gosh! that crew in my carriage!" He groaned and rose unwillingly.

She said, "Won't you finish your luncheon first?" and he sat down again and deliberately disposed of his share of the provisions. She suggested, "Why don't you stand in the corridor for a bit near the third class part?"

"I will if you'll come too?" said Dan coaxingly, his eyes smiling an invitation at her. She hesitated, then said in her detached manner, "Yes, I'd love to. Wait a minute. I must bring my fiddle with me. It's frightfully precious. I daren't leave it. I believe that they're very honest as a rule, these Germans, but they're so musical it doesn't seem quite fair to leave it about."

She stretched up to the rack, swaying slightly as the train clattered along. Dan steadied her by putting his hands on her shoulders, then handed the violin case down to her. They looked into each other's eyes for a second and he said self-consciously, "Hope I'm not dragging you away from old man Rhine?" She gave an indifferent glance over her shoulder at the great river shining under the afternoon sun, and said, "Oh, I've seen enough castles for the moment. Besides, we shall be coming to the Lorelei soon and I think the guide book says that it's on the other side."

An hour later found them standing side by side in the corridor, clinging to the window bar and conversing in confidential tones. Dan's rather unnecessary inquiry as to whether she played the violin,

had led her to confide that she was an orphan (her father Colonel Gilchrist had been killed in the war) that she had to earn her own living, that she was going to study music at Munich for two years with a view to teaching the violin later on, and that at the moment she was on her way to stay for three months with her aunt, Mrs. Gilchrist, widow of Uncle William Gilchrist, late (by two years) English clergyman at Freiburg. She told Dan with a fervour that surprised him that she loved her violin more than anything else in the world, and added diffidently that "she had been lucky so far, as she had managed to get through her exams and had even collected a few medals en route."

Having received this straightforward and blameless account of her life, Dan proceeded to give a glib and somewhat garbled account of his own career up to date. What it amounted to was that he was the younger son of a respectable Irish family; that he had decided to take up a post in Sicily with a large firm of wine merchants, that he had arranged to be motored down through Germany by a friend, that the friend had been detained in London by urgent private affairs, and that consequently he was travelling on the cheap down to Italy, as he was a trifle short of funds. "Nothing serious," he added as a pair of generous brown eyes were lifted to his.

Where was he staying that night? she asked him.

"Freiburg," he told her promptly. He had received one of his lightning-like inspirations. Perhaps, after all, it would be safer to wire for more

money before he went much further. Money did melt away with incredible rapidity. Everything pointed to a day or two at Freiburg. Naturally it would be neither so easy nor so pleasant to make this sudden disclosure of his distressed circumstances from Germany, as it would have been to have done so from Italy, where a dozen good reasons might have occurred to his parents as having caused his delay, such as a railway accident, difficulties with the fascists, a high temperature, necessitating immediate removal to a nursing home and so on. He could almost hear Aunt Sophy's, "Don't waste time wondering what's happened to the poor boy. Send him the money at once." Then a letter from Sicily making the most of Cadwalleder's treachery and his own enterprising trip on very little money through Germany would have smoothed things down. Yes, it would have been better, but the fine shades of difference in his parents' feelings did not weigh very heavily with him at that moment, as he stood in the stuffy corridor beside his new-found friend. His favourite motto was, "It'll all be the same in a hundred years' time." The main thing was to get to Sicily somehow or other, and meanwhile he was in very good company. He was sure that his mother would have approved of this Scotch damsel and that his father would probably have approved of her still more. Dan was always surprised to find how readily Sir Seymour could appreciate a pretty face when he saw one.

Fiona was saying excitedly, "We're coming to the

Lorelei! Look out!" Her small hands fumbled with the Baedeker.

"By the way, who was the good woman?" asked Dan grandiosely ignorant.

"She wasn't good. That's just the point. She sat on a rock wearing nothing but her hair and combed it, enticing sailors and other passers-by to their destruction."

"Good for her! Those old-fashioned vamps had one up on you shingled girls."

Fiona ran her hand through her silky mop of hair, laughed, and read out of the guide book.

"On the left rise the imposing rocks of the Lurlei, or Lorelei, 430 ft. above the Rhine. The well-known legend of the fairy who had her dwelling on the rock, and, like the sirens of old, enticed sailors and fishermen to their destruction in the rapids at the foot of the precipice, has long been a favourite theme with the poet and the painter. Heine's beautiful ballad (1823) is still deservedly popular. According to Marner, a poet of the 13th cent. the Nibelungen treasure lies hidden beneath the 'Lurlenberg.'—At the foot of the Lurlei is a large harbour. This is the narrowest (about 220 yds.) and deepest (76 ft.) part of the river. The famous echo returned by the lofty cliffs on both sides is not audible from the steamer, but may be successfully wakened from a small boat in the quiet of early morning or late evening."

The train shrieked and swerved round a corner. Fiona cried, "Quick! Open the window! Quick!

Quick! We shall miss it. We may never see it again." He wrenched the window open and they both leant out, Dan with his arm round her shoulder. Then he sprang back. "Damn . . . I beg your pardon! I've got a smut in my eye." He was pawing a streaming eye. Fiona tore his dirty handkerchief away from him and dancing up and down in front of him commanded, "Don't! don't! let me try. Take your hand away at once! You're only making it worse."

Acting on her instructions he blew his nose, held his eyelid down and finally reeled back into the carriage, where he collapsed on the seat and delivered himself up to her ministrations. With a clean handkerchief and delicate steady fingers, she removed the smut. Dan, meek and grateful, said, "You are a clever little thing. You ought to be a lady doctor."

She replied airily, "I should simply hate to be one. I'd rather listen to the complaints of a violin than of a patient." She liked to do a thing thoroughly while she was about it, was disappointed at having missed the Lorelei, and added regretfully, "Well, we didn't see much of the Lorelei! It was a shame that you got something in your eye just at that moment—however, it doesn't matter a bit as far as I'm concerned—"she ended tactfully—but Dan remained unmoved.

There was silence for a while. Fiona was looking out of the window, the rays of the setting sun bathing her small meditative face in a golden haze. The

Rhine was beginning to take on the translucent look of dark green glass. She stared down at it as though she were trying to catch a glimpse of some mysterious beings dwelling in its depths, then hummed a few notes to herself. Dan demanded, "What's the odd tune? Sounds like the song the old cow died of." She turned and smiled at him—"Oh—I was trying to hum the motif of the Rhine music in the Rhinegold." As he looked quite blank, she said deprecatingly, "Wagner's opera you know. All about the Rhinemaidens." He said abruptly, "You're like a Rhinemaiden. You look so cool." She laughed and said hurriedly and defensively, "I wouldn't like to be a mermaid, either a sea or river one. It would be such a slushy life—all fishes and seaweed. Anyhow I think that the Rhinemaidens were fine-looking women with long golden hair and well-developed figures."

"You've got a beautiful figure, if you don't mind my saying so," persisted Dan gallantly. "Just right. I hate these lumping girls who can't ride without giving a horse a sore back. Can you ride?"

"No. I'm terrified of horses."

Dan was shocked into silence, then with an effort he said, "Oh, well, you could always learn."

She replied independently, "Oh, but I don't mean to! Riding would never be any use to me."

"How do you know? You might marry a hunting man."

"I'll never do that," she answered with vigour, "they're so stupid."

He said with great dignity, "I'm sorry that you think they're stupid. *I* hunt."

She subsided into silence, gave him a confused glance, then turned her head away towards the window. He rose and looked down at her triumphantly. "You've been a very rude little girl, but I forgive you. I must go back now to the odd pig-sty. See you later," and swung out of the carriage.

The rest of the journey passed quickly for Dan. His encounter with the little Scotch lass (as he mentally termed Fiona) had restored him to his habitual good humour. He abandoned himself to the renewed blandishments of the pig-tailed infant, who, unfatigued by hours of travelling, trotted towards him the moment that he re-entered the third class compartment. So agreeable did he make himself to her, turning out his pockets for her benefit and addressing her as "Gretchen," that by the time he had reached Freiburg, he had won the confidence and approval of the older occupants of the carriage. The individual in the feathered felt hat even embarked on a conversation with him, which ran roughly as follows:

"Das Kind ist mein Nichtchen. Ich sehe sie lieben kinder?" ("The little one is my niece. You are fond of children I see?")

"Ja, Ja," from Dan, who did not understand a word, but who was getting thirsty again and had designs on a half-finished bottle of beer that was propped up by the side of the proud and feathered uncle.

"Sind sie verheiratet?" ("You are married?")

Another reckless nod from Dan.

"Was? so jung?" ("What? so young?") then with heavy jocularity, "Sie sind wohl jung verheiratet und haben naturlich noch keine Kinder?" ("You are a bridegroom of course. No family yet?") Dan catching the word "Kinder" and dimly imagining that he was being asked what his own family consisted of, thought of his two brothers, threw himself in and held up three fingers. He was surprised and gratified at the chorus of admiration from the surrounding matrons. The feathered person patted him approvingly on the shoulder and handed him the beer as a silent tribute.

As the train slid into the station at Freiburg, Dan made rapid adieux to his fellow passengers, jumped out onto the platform and went along to find Fiona.

Mrs. Gilchrist, who had been waiting for some time for the train, which was a quarter of an hour late, was surprised to see her niece in company with a tall young man who was carrying her hand luggage and bending over her in lively conversation.

"Aunt Jenny!"

Fiona flung herself into her aunt's arms.

"Dear child, are you dreadfully tired? Poor little thing. Come along, I've got a taxi outside waiting, and Maria has a good supper for us, and then you must go straight to bed." As she rambled on in her hearty voice, she eyed Dan with suspicion.

Fiona disentangled herself and explained with vivacity that her companion was Mr. Cavanagh who

had been very kind to her on the journey and had taken her part when a student was rude to her. Here Dan broke in to the effect that on the contrary, Miss Gilchrist had saved his sight by removing a smut from his eye, then stopped talking and looked hopefully at the old lady.

Mrs. Gilchrist was reassured. There was no mistaking the quality of his low voice, she thought. Nor was she unsusceptible to masculine attractions. "A nice boy," she thought. A few minutes later Mrs. and Miss Gilchrist had dropped Dan at a small hotel which the former highly recommended, and after some necessarily rapid but effective blandishments on his part, he had been invited to call on them the next day at the "Villa Rosa."

He told himself as he watched the taxi rattle off with the two ladies, that it had been touch and go with the old girl. It was easy to see that she was not one to encourage stray fellows like himself as friends for her niece, but somehow or other he had managed to do the trick. He thought as he unpacked that so far his luck had held.

V

THE BLACK FOREST

SLENDER, dark columns rising stark out of the clean ground, with its crumbling surface of pine cones and pine needles, the sun filtering through the black canopy of tree tops, and filling the forest with a nebulous light, the air drenched with a sweet, kind, aromatic smell, and tingling with the hum of insects. Warmth, shadows and a murmuring quietness.

Fiona and Dan lay stretched out on the fragrant ground. She lolled, her head propped on her brown hand, her shapely figure relaxed in the unstudied nonchalance of extreme youth. Her eyes had the pensive brightness of a woodland animal, and held in their golden brown depths a look of spurious meditation. Her thoughts were caught up in a web of content and well-being. After a silence she murmured, "It's like being under the sea, it's so dim and green."

"What's that, Fiona?" inquired Dan, rolling onto his side to look at her. "Your hair is full of pine needles. Don't bother, you're looking sweet."

Fiona smiled at him and then told him confidentially, "I never thought that my first week in Ger-

many would be such fun. I felt rather depressed before I came out here. I hated leaving school at Easter, and I've been staying ever since then with a rather dreary cousin at Wimbledon." She went on idly, "Cousin Kate is Aunt Jenny's relation but she's not a bit like Aunt Jenny, who's a darling, isn't she? Cousin Kate is married but she's more spinsterish than lots of old maids. She always looks as if she had swallowed a poker and was trying to digest it! She was always criticising short skirts and short hair." She added, in her voice in which pathos and comedy seemed to be struggling for the mastery, "I don't know why it is that some older people are so annoyed because one's like the rest of one's generation. After all they never tried to be different from theirs, even though it meant wearing those ghastly bustles and leg of mutton sleeves."

Dan, lighting his pipe, said sympathetically, "Ah! the old cat was madly jealous of your being young and attractive."

Fiona shrugged her shoulders. "Anyhow she was fond of reminding me that I'm penniless. Quite unnecessary, as I meant to earn my living from the moment that my father was killed. After all, heaps of girls do now-a-days! I don't mind having to work a bit, do you? but one doesn't want to keep on talking about it."

Dan heaved over uneasily and began to throw sticks at a tree-trunk, then he said abruptly: "Work's beastly! The less said about it the better." She was surprised at his vehement tone, and feeling that

she had touched upon a sore subject was silent. He said at random: "Did I tell you that I went to an opera in Cologne the other night? It was Old-Man Wagner. About the flying horse-women or what not. It was a comic show!"

"Oh, the Valkyries! What luck for you! I've always longed to hear the Ring."

She hoped that she hadn't put too priggish an emphasis on the word "hear," and was preparing to flit tactfully onto another remark, but Dan corrected her pompously. "There was nothing about a Ring in it. You're getting muddled."

"No, I'm not! The Ring is the name for a cycle of operas written round the same story. You heard one of them."

"Yes, I jolly well did, and heaven save me from another! It was all right up to a point, but I've never listened to such a septic whale of a din in my life. I don't pretend to care for these highbrow shows. Give me an odd revue with some hot dancing in it any old time."

He was mortified by her superior knowledge and was determined to keep her in her place. He favoured old-fashioned views with regard to women. She grew pink, and held her ground with sturdy determination.

"Oh, well, of course, there is no reason why people should like Wagner if they don't want to, but it's simply childish to call it a septic whale of a din—" (her voice rose a little). "Naturally Wagner takes a lot of studying and understanding, and it's a ques-

tion of taste whether people want to study it, but there is something there worth understanding, that's what I mean. But I can't explain it properly——"

Realising that she had taken it so unnecessarily to heart Dan smiled kindly at her and said in tones of finality, "Well, I expect it's like religion. My grandfather used to say that one had to either swallow it like a black pill or leave it alone——"

Fiona giggled, then relapsed into thought. The knowledge, brought home to her for the first time, that it is possible to cherish a strong fancy for a young man without having any tastes in common, had given a temporary wistfulness to her face.

"What's happened to that squirrel?" asked Dan lying on his back and staring up into the dark lacework of the boughs above him. "By Jove, it is ripping here." He pointed with his pipe down the veiled pathways of the forest. "Look, how dark it is down there. That's evidently why they call it the Black Forest."

She said saucily, "Brilliant boy! Go up to the top of the form."

"Look here. If you give me any more cheek, I'll go off and leave you here alone. I bet you don't know the way back! You were talking the whole time."

"Oh, I'll be all right! The gnomes will look after me, like they did Rose-Red!" Fiona threw at him playfully, with a flirtatious glance from under her lashes.

"Never heard of her."

"You've never heard of anybody! You must have read Grimm's fairy tales? After all, you've been to a public school."

The forest echoed with his derisive laughter. "What an oddity you are! Well, I believe I did read them in my infant days before you were born." He moved closer to her and said banteringly: "Shall I build a little house here for us to live in? I'll cut trees and you can cook and play your violin and mend my socks."

She looked at him with an enigmatic expression in her eyes. "But *can* you cut wood?"

He unconsciously squared his shoulders. "I can do anything if I put my mind to it. The trouble with me," he added loftily, "is that I'm bone lazy, and I'm afraid that I'm too old to begin reforming."

She gave a faint sigh and became lost in mysterious meditations. She could not have analysed her own thoughts, but if she had only known it she was dimly experiencing some of the maternal pangs that had so often rent the heart of the distant Lady Cavanagh.

After a long silence she brightened up and dropping a handful of pine needles over his hand which lay close to hers, she said hesitatingly, "Well, anyhow, you're rather a dear."

Dan seized her fingers and drawing her to him kissed her fervently. She sprang to her feet, surprised and agitated. Her eyes were shining as though with tears. He was full of exhilarated compunction. "Oh, I say! Have I been an awful cad?

I'm so sorry, Fiona. What a beast I've been. You must hate me."

She looked away from him, then she said in a low voice, "No, I loved it." He put his arm round her and they sat down again, he leaning against a tree-trunk and she leaning her head against his shoulder. They remained like this in a beatific silence, then he said, with rising masculine vanity: "Poor little darling! How frightened you were when I kissed you."

"Well, I've never been kissed before."

He felt that it was a pity that he could not say, "No, nor have I," but a year's residence in Dublin with its attendant club dances, cinema parties and plentiful mistletoe at Christmas, put this out of the question. He could, however, say genuinely, "I never realised before what it was like to kiss a girl like you."

A silence enveloped them again. They were both beginning to long for tea, but neither of them wanted to shatter the charmed silence. Finally Fiona said in a small, womanly voice, "I'm sure you must be thirsty, Dan. I'm going to get the tea ready."

She busied herself with the hamper, while he watched her with complacent possessiveness. Seated close together they ate vociferously, laughed self-consciously, and eyed each other tenderly. The milk-bread and honey, the pastries and steaming coffee in the thermos flask, prepared for them by Aunt Jenny, tasted incredibly delicious. To Fiona, this meal, spread on the sandy floor of the forest, was a banquet to celebrate her first kiss.

The purple bloom of the sunlight had left the tree-trunks. The ragged pools of pale sunlight, sparsely scattered over the ground, had faded. The forest had taken on the brooding darkness of a woodcut in a fairy tale. It was getting late, and she began to pack their small hamper. He suggested, "Let's go for a walk further into the forest."

"Better not. I promised Aunt Jenny that we'd be back at seven." She looked up at him from under her dark eyelashes. "You know, we were lucky to have been allowed to have this picnic at all. Aunt Jenny's rather old-fashioned, and when you suggested it yesterday, she was quite taken aback and disapproving. I don't know how you talked her round. I think it helped my not having had a real birthday party this year, and then it was lucky her friend, Miss Grier, having met your Aunt at Bath, and always talking about her, so that Aunt Jenny feels that she almost knows her."

"I know what you're worrying about," he said rather sarcastically. "You want to show me that you're a nicely chaperoned little puss."

Fiona dropped her end of the hamper with a thud, and flashed at him, "How dare you! It's awful cheek to have said that. I suppose that this is the result of letting you kiss me. I never meant to let anyone do that till I got engaged, and now I am punished," she wound up indignantly, glaring at him. He assured her quickly and humbly that he had only been chaffing her, that he realised how

lucky he was to be able to take her out, and that she was the most wonderful girl in the world.

She accepted his apology with a dignified smile, picked up her end of the hamper, and they continued on their way down the sandy path, Dan chanting with mock solemnity, "Behold, how blessed a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

They left the enchanted forest behind them, and joined the desultory stream of people returning to Freiburg—gangs of fresh-looking girls in sleeveless cotton frocks, displaying large brown arms, their luxurious hair bound with bandeaux, enclosed in coloured nets, or cut in heavy shingles; jolly parents, chattering children carrying ferns and pine cones, crop-headed youths in green knickerbockers. Dan and Fiona hurried down the tree-lined road that led to Mrs. Gilchrist's villa. At the side of the road, a clear little stream, neatly banked and bridged, hurried discreetly down with them, chestnuts and leaves floating on its tiny current.

The Villa Rosa was one of the many small, neat green-shuttered houses on the fringes of the town. From the road it was almost hidden in its shady, flower-crammed garden. Aunt Jenny, in black silk, with lace collar and cuffs, greeted them in the porch, "Well, had a nice day? Supper will be ready in about half an hour. It's a little late because Maria has had to go down to the town to fetch the cream; silly girl! I told her to get it this morning when she went to the market. But there it is. She thinks of nothing but these kinematographs. She's a good,

well-meaning creature, but a regular modern girl, so different from dear old Hilda who was with me for so many years. However, times must change and the sooner we old people realise it the better, I suppose. One must be broad-minded nowadays, and let people do as they like." She beamed at the young couple, who had put on supernaturally innocent expressions, and agreed with fervour.

Dan, before dining at the Villa Rosa, went back to his hotel on the excuse of seeing if any letters had arrived for him. What he really hoped to receive was money telegraphed out to him by his parents. The morning after his arrival, he had gone to the post office and using, in a moment of belated economy, a useful little book containing a system of codes for telegrams, which his father had given him, while retaining another copy for himself, he had carefully selected the word, "INVALA" which meant, "No money, in great difficulties, send at once £10." He had added the word "Daniel" and the address of his hotel, dispatched a picture postcard to the Wansteads with the information that he was unavoidably delayed in Germany, and with a light heart had gone off to pay his respects to the ladies at the Villa Rosa, with such good results that he had been invited to tea the same day, while to-day he had been allowed to take Fiona to the forest. They had left for their picnic early that afternoon, and he had had no doubts that the asked-for remittance would arrive during his absence, and that he would find it on his return to the hotel. He had made due allowance for

the slowness of the Bally Cavan post office, and for the fact that his parents might have been out all the previous day, and therefore might not have sent their telegram till this morning. It had been a wonderful day, a ripping day, but now where was the money? The proprietor, sitting behind his desk, shook his head in answer to his anxious inquiry, and told him that he had nothing for him. He went slowly up to his room, sat on the huge feather eiderdown and meditated. During the last week, he seemed to have done a good deal of meditating on hotel beds, and it was acquiring the oppressive monotony of a nightmare. This time the situation was serious. His parents had let him down. He could hardly believe it, but there was no other explanation. He knew them to be just but uncompromising when angered. Thinking it over, he came to the conclusion that perhaps he had underrated the shock that the abrupt disclosure of his whereabouts would cause them. It would have been better if he could have written an explanatory letter, but lack of time had rendered this impossible. It was obvious that his parents, not realising the acuteness of his financial situation had decided to punish him for what, he now admitted, must seem to them to be a mad escapade. They were waiting for an apology and an explanation. Well, they would not get it. For one thing there was not time. He was certainly not going to sit here, with his money dwindling rapidly away, awaiting his parents' pleasure, and possibly being forced to borrow from the Gilchrists.

His parents would not take his word. Very well, he would show them that he was no longer a child to be frightened by nursery punishments. He would not be surprised if Aunt Maureen was at the bottom of this outrageous silence. His imagination ran wildly through labyrinths of dark possibilities, hideous suspicions. He was in one of his rare moods of sullen determination. But once more he had made up his mind what to do.

With a nasty scowl on his face he got off the bed and prepared to go back to Fiona—and supper.

She had changed into a green muslin dress, had brushed her hair into a semblance of a shining cap, and greeted him with lively looks. The moment that he arrived, she noticed that his spirits had undergone some subtle change. He looked solemn and preoccupied, and the habitual gleam of humour in his eye was gone. She was oppressed by something in his manner that she could not explain, and made vain efforts to dissipate his gloom, but during the meal Aunt Jenny had to do most of the talking. "Fiona tells me that you're off to Italy to-morrow. Which train are you taking? Would you like some sandwiches?" Dan thanked her sadly, and told her that he was leaving very early in the morning. After supper, Aunt Jenny suggested that Fiona should play to them. She sat down at the piano, and Fiona fetched her music and her violin and played in a desultory way for an hour. She had a sympathetic touch and interpreted the Hungarian folk songs that she had chosen with a promising

technique and considerable verve. A knowledgeable listener would have predicted that she would one day become an interesting and excellent violinist. Dan made no attempt to analyse her talents, he only knew that he was enjoying her performance more than he had imagined possible. He would have been the first to admit that he was not musical in the strict sense of the word. The booming of a dinner-gong, the sounds of a hunting-horn, the strains of a jazz band, and one or two favourite hymns had so far satisfied his needs in this direction, but this Hungarian music opened up fresh vistas for him. He began by admiring Fiona's well-knit young figure as she stood in the darkening room, violin to shoulder, her whole being absorbed in the music that she was producing with her pale, nervous fingers. Her face, shadowed by her soft hair, had an expression of complete detachment which gave her a fleeting resemblance to a child-angel playing in the heavenly choir on the frescoed walls of some Italian church. Then the gay and gallant strains of the "czardas" that she was playing caught his untrained attention. It seemed to tell him that life was not such a bad show after all, in spite of financial embarrassments and unimaginative parents. With hardly a break she changed from the "czardas" into a plaintive love song in a minor key. It was like the sound of the sea lapping upon a deserted shore. Dan felt mildly depressed and it occurred to him that he might never see Fiona again. Life was more difficult to arrange agreeably than he had

once imagined. When she stopped playing, he asked her shyly, not being quite sure whether it was the kind of thing that a "highbrow" violinist would care for, if she knew the Londonderry Air." He was pleased when she pronounced it as being "lovely" and began to play it. He had last heard it being hummed by one of his mother's housemaids as she swept the stairs, and he was surprised at the ennobling transformation that it underwent at Fiona's hands. He felt uplifted this time, and hoped vaguely to do better in future.

As she put down her violin she looked at Dan and saw that he was smiling at her. "He *is* good-looking," she thought admiringly, "that's my idea of what a man ought to look like. And he's got a lot in him—but he wants understanding."

"How jolly well you play. You're a regular Paderewski."

"You're a regular Mrs. Malaprop," she retorted. He grimaced rudely at her behind Aunt Jenny's broad back, and showed signs of settling himself down for a prolonged sitting, but Aunt Jenny looked at her watch, smiled pleasantly, and somehow hypnotised him into mumbling reluctantly the fatal words, "Well—I suppose . . . I ought to be getting a move on?" Aunt Jenny looked as kind as ever, but made no demur. Fiona darted out of the room, saying, "I'm going to get the cake that Aunt Jenny's got for you." She returned a few moments later bearing a handsome plum cake. Aunt Jenny remarked, "I thought that it might be a comfort to

you on the journey." He thanked her at some length for this, and all her other kindnesses and at last prepared to take his departure. He gave Fiona a meaning glance, and murmuring something hurriedly to her aunt about "showing Mr. Cavanagh the way to the gate," she went with Dan out of the house.

The garden was submerged in the dusk and the flowers, drained of all their colour, were like pale ghosts of themselves. Their scent burdened the warm night air. A white butterfly brushed fitfully past Fiona's face. She put up her hand to ward it off, and gave a shaky laugh. "They say that white butterflies are the souls of people who have just died."

He bent down and kissed her hair, "Don't let's talk about dying. This world is good enough for me as long as you are in it."

She murmured, "But we've only just met."

"That doesn't mean anything. One might know a girl for years and admire her and all that, and yet never have the feelings for her that I have for you."

"What do you feel, Dan?" she whispered, half-laughingly.

They had come to the gate. A lilac tree overhung it, swooning under its overload of lovely blossom. Fiona stood a little away from him pulling at a flowery branch with timid movements. In her pale frock, with her bent dark head and her slender arms, she was the nymph of the lilac tree, ready to

spring back at the first alarm into its scented shadows.

"This is what I feel, you sweet little darling," replied Dan in a low voice, and catching her to him kissed her. She leant against him in confused happiness. As they clung together the overpowering scent of the lilac seemed the very expression of their youthful passion, so that they hardly knew which was lilac and which was love.

She looked up at him and gave him a tender smile.

He whispered, "Darling, I'll write to you."

"Fiona, are you coming in?" came Aunt Jenny's kindly, commanding voice from the house.

Dan gave her a last hug, pressed her hand tightly, let her go and went through the gate.

"Good-bye. Good luck!"

"Yes. Good luck!"

VI

MORE BLACK FOREST

DAN placed on the bed, contemplated, and then packed in his knapsack the following objects:

1 toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste
1 tablet of soap
1 tin of tobacco
Razor, shaving stick and strop
2 brushes and a bottle of brilliantine
1 change of underclothes
3 pairs of socks
1 nailbrush
1 clothes brush
Passport
Handbook of conversational German
Map of Black Forest
Code book
Prayer Book (given to him on his nineteenth birthday by his parents)
3 linen handkerchiefs

and a silk one, on which was enscrolled all the Derby winners from the first race to the present year, and a snapshot of Fiona which she had slipped into his hand the evening before. The rest of the capacious,

shabby knapsack which he had acquired from a waiter in exchange for an old sweater, was filled up by the Gilchrist cake, two bars of chocolate, two oranges, a bottle of beer, a good-sized sausage and a couple of rolls.

The pale light of early morning crept into the bare hotel bedroom, giving an austere rather than a festive tone to the proceedings. He had certainly known more joyous awakenings. The fact that he had not been able to have a cold bath that morning had not improved his spirits. He had gone along to the bathroom, only to find it occupied by a belated tourist wrapped in blankets, and in deep slumber. However, the knapsack felt surprisingly light as he hoisted it onto his broad shoulders, and walked with creaking steps down the stairs.

As he gulped down a great lungful of fresh morning air, the remnants of his drowsiness and slackness vanished, and he felt remarkably fit and energetic, which was just as well as he intended to walk from Freiburg to the Italian frontier.

Amazing sight! A modern young man on foot and purposing to remain on foot for at least a week! Dan did not differ in this respect from his contemporaries. He abhorred walking. He considered it "a mug's game," "a complete waste of time" and a "—— sweat." A hard day's hunting, a strenuous afternoon's tennis, miles of scorching on a second-hand motor-bicycle along temperamental Irish roads, all these activities he found infinitely less tiring than a quarter of an hour's walk down to the Bally

Cavan post office. There was something about walking that fatigued his brain. He had been driven to this desperate pedestrian feat only by a relentless combination of straitened finances and intense moral indignation.

The previous night, on parting from Fiona, he had gone straight to the station, and thumbing a handbook of conversational German had thrown himself on the mercies of a spectacled, black-bearded official. This hard-working individual had received his ungrammatical mutterings with marked coldness. He could not imagine why this excited and suspiciously bright-eyed young Englishman was trying to travel down to Italy third or fourth class, or why he should be expected to understand his execrable German. How could he know that Dan had just parted from his first love under a lilac tree, and that moreover the conversational handbook was, in the manner of handbooks, singularly unhelpful, abounding more in dramatic phrases of the "Herr Landlord! I fear that the coachman has been struck by lightning," variety than in practical sentences? After a gruelling quarter of an hour's dialogue, it had dawned on Dan that even going third class, he had not sufficient money left to travel by railway all the way down to Italy, and he had walked back in profound dejection through the silent cobbled streets to the hotel. A waiter scurrying round the small dining room had given him a match for his pipe and had begun to practise his English on him.

"You leave Freiburg to-morrow, my sir?"

"Yes."

"You go by train?"

"I don't know."

"How you do not know? You walk perhaps? A walking-tour?"

Dan, who had been on the point of leaving the room, had sat down, and half an hour later they were poring over a map together. It had appeared that the waiter had a brother called Ludwig, also a waiter, who from reasons of economy, and other reasons not altogether unconnected with the police, had once walked from Italy into the Fatherland. Dan had told the waiter that he thought this a very sporting and original way of travelling and that he had half a mind to try it himself, for he was sick of trains. In actual fact, he had come to the instantaneous conclusion that here was the solution of his problem. He would walk night and day (assisted by beer), sleep out and live hard. If necessary he would get work on the way (ha! ha! that would be one for Fiona). He would be sure to get lifts and in this way he would be able to keep enough money to enable him to take a train from the Italian frontier to Palermo. At a pinch he could wire to the Wansteads from Italy for cash. They would only conclude that his pocket book had been stolen. But he hoped that he would not have to come to this. The day would be saved. His honour would be vindicated. His parents put to shame. What ho!

After having made out his route to the Swiss

frontier, and arranged for his suitcase to be kept at the hotel till he sent for it, he had tipped the waiter and had gone to bed feeling curiously strong and noble.

Now he was beginning to feel strong and noble again, as he made his leisurely way through the sleeping town. Soon Freiburg with its soaring cathedral tower, its clustering houses and leafy gardens bathed in the tender morning sunlight, lay behind him. He paused at a bend of the ascending road to look back at it and thought of Fiona down there among the trees, in one of those little green-shuttered villas, and wondered whether she would miss him. He also wondered why the knapsack had suddenly grown in weight and decided to lighten it by having his breakfast as soon as he had got into the forest. He took a last look at Freiburg, dismissed it with—"not a bad old hole. Pity I didn't have time to look at the odd sights," and then shifted his knapsack, took his hat off, put it on again, reflected with pleasure on the bottle of beer, and finally getting into his stride, swung on and up into the dark masses of the woods. Ignoring the shadowy heights above him, and the awakening world of squirrels and birds around him, he trudged on, keeping his eyes fixed on the sandy path with its knotted roots. For the first time in his life he thought with real bitterness of his parents. They had indeed let him down with a whale of a thump! His father's severity was understandable, because as he knew from experience, when Sir Seymour did deliver himself up to

righteous anger it took him some time to recover from it. He was slow about everything and, Dan considered, deficient in a sense of humour. To take only one instance of his father's cheerless outlook on life, he had never forgotten the stern disapproval that a quite harmless joke of his had roused in the paternal breast. It had been his last term at his public school, and a discouraging and discouraged letter had arrived from Sir Seymour on the subject of his youngest son's disinclination to work, ending up with the words, "And now perhaps you can tell me what the future holds for you?"

Dan anxious to "cheer the Guvnor up" (he thought it was probably his liver that was troubling him) had despatched a facetious telegram: "Splendid future, have been offered the Mastership of the Pytchley Hounds." No—his father was distinctly dour when things went wrong.

But his mother? She might have come to his rescue. After all, though she was severe, she was a sport and his mother. It was an understood thing all the world over that there was nobody like a mother. Why there was even a hymn about it beginning "Can a Mother's tender care cease towards the child she bear?"

Well, evidently it could. It was a bitter discovery and as Aunt Maureen was fond of saying, "left a nasty taste in the mouth."

He supposed that both his parents were finally and completely fed up with him this time. Of course, he had been a bit of a trial to them. He admitted

it. All the same he could not help feeling that there was something to be said on his side. He was the youngest and as such, he had been alternately fussed over and ignored. He had been treated like a child, and now he had behaved like a damn fool. Having made this confession to himself, he crossed a rustic bridge and sat down by the side of a mountain stream to have breakfast. The water was sparkling and clear and chortling, as it threw itself down a pile of polished boulders and swept away under the bridge, hustling scraps of twigs and cones in its wake. It was a busy conscientious little stream. After a good feed of roll, butter and sausage he felt inclined to linger by its side, but it seemed to say as it gurgled by, "Got to get to Italy . . . Got to get to Italy . . . mein Herr," (this as it rippled out of sight). He rose slowly and went on his way. He realised now that it was a mistake to eat too soon in the day. It transferred the weight onto the wrong part of the anatomy.

The path was growing steeper, zig-zagging up. He got into his stride again and walked steadily for several hours. He was enjoying the exercise and the sweet, bracing air. The forest flowed past him, with its monotonous but infinite variety, the steep vistas of pine and fir, lightened by paler birch and beech, a lizard slithering from under the boulders and ferns, a cascade foaming down a miniature precipice, rivulets trickling across the path, a cluster of wild strawberries, a flash of red squirrel, a may bush with starry branches growing on the bank, butter-

flies dancing in the sunlight—velvety brown butterflies, diminutive black butterflies, butterflies like winged blue flowers—and then the forest opening and showing a giddy view of the valleys below. He noticed it all without noticing it. Every now and then pedestrians would pass him on their downward way to Freiburg, young men with bare knees, and cropped heads. It was growing hot and the path, wandering along the hill side, exposed him to the full glare of the midday sun. The moment had arrived, he thought, to come to terms with his knapsack. It seemed to him that it was becoming every moment more obstreperous and tyrannical. Something—he suspected one of his brushes—was digging at his backbone. He sat down on a rock at the side of the path and dragged out its contents. He finished the beer in one gulp, and threw away the bottle with regret. He felt as though he were parting with a friend and wondered when he would see its like again. He then looked doubtfully at the remains of the food, and stuffed it into the pocket of his blazer, with the exception of the cake which he replaced in the knapsack. He was already painfully hungry, but realised that if he partook of sausage and cheese in this heat, he would soon be laid out, and go to sleep in the shade with the Derby handkerchief over his face. This thought suggested to him the idea of tying this informative piece of silk round his head instead of his felt hat which was getting unbearably hot. "Pretty foul thing to do," he reflected, "but what's the point of getting sunstroke?

Anyhow in this benighted country they're all quite wet, so it doesn't matter. You've only got to look at their clothes." Dan was not given to outbreaks of insularity, but he was beginning to feel that he had had enough of Germany. He had now definitely made up his mind that with an odd twenty-five miles a day tramp before him on frugal meals, he would have to lighten his knapsack. The clothes brush, the nailbrush and one of his hair brushes had to go, and to tell the truth their going did not cause him any acute pangs. He took out the prayer book and contemplated it for a few minutes, but finally a superstitious feeling that to throw it away would be as good as repudiating the Church of Ireland, induced him to keep it. He felt that he had already broken with his family and that it was just as well not to burn all his boats. The bottle of brilliantine had broken and the code book was floating in the sticky liquid, so he removed the pieces of glass and with lowering brow fished out the red handbook. He opened it and looked up the fatal word. Yes, there it was, there was no mistake, INVALA and the corresponding meaning, "No money, in great difficulties, send at once £10," and there he was sitting almost penniless, completely friendless and quite beerless with the Black Forest behind, around, and especially in front of him. His parents had certainly played a dirty trick upon him. He had known them for nearly nineteen years and realising all their faults as he did, he had never suspected that they were capable of such conduct. It *hurt.*

Perhaps it might have hurt less had he known that owing to his peculiar handwriting the word INVALA had arrived at Bally Cavan transformed into INVILA. (Dan's "a's" were inclined to lose their figure and to go a bit flat-chested.) The word INVILA according to the code book meant "Telegraph health of baby. Shall I come?" The appalling shock of finding that their youngest son (who had already caused them anxiety by giving no sign of life since Great-great uncle Leander's funeral) was now wandering about in Germany of all places, in an apparent state of dementia (unless he was carrying to criminal lengths his propensity for practical joking) had left Sir Seymour and Lady Cavanagh stunned for some time. Finally looking rather aged, Sir Seymour had retired into his study, there to write a letter covering four sheets of foolscap, asking for an explanation, and recapitulating the whole of Daniel's career up to date. He had also written a brief note to the consul at Freiburg begging him to get into touch with his erring son.

But Dan, ignorant of his parents' sufferings, let bitterness take possession of his heart and finally hurled the code book viciously at a tree below him, where it bounced off and span down into space.

The afternoon passed off unpleasantly. The forest path wended its knobbly way up many hills and down into many valleys. Flies pursued him. He wondered irritably if these identical flies really intended to follow him all the way to Italy, or if there was any hope of them turning back at the

frontier. After hours of plodding up and stalking down in the heat, he had acquired a blister and a morose outlook on life. This solitary pilgrimage was beginning to have a depressing effect on his gregarious nature. He would have welcomed the chance of a little friendly conversation, with a fellow being, at least with one of his own sex. He had not the slightest inclination to see any ladies at the moment—not even Fiona. There was no doubt, he decided, that there were moments in a man's life when only the company of a fellow man was welcome. The presence of the opposite sex always entailed a certain amount of effort of either a pleasant or unpleasant nature. Not, of course, that a normal chap was wanting to show off the whole time, but it seemed difficult to be oneself with girls.

An elderly German wearing gaiters and carrying a butterfly-net passed him, greeting him with a jolly "Guten Tag." Dan regretted for the first time his inability to speak the lingo (or any lingo for that matter) though he still clung to his firm conviction that it was the first duty of every foreigner to learn English. Anyhow, he told himself, it was extremely unlikely that he would have been able to keep up with the old buffer, who to his indignation had leapt onward and upwards with the agility of a mountain goat.

"There is no doubt," he thought, "walking is an accomplishment." He considered that he was in fairly good condition in spite of his week in London, and he was certainly used to taking hard exercise,

but this involuntary walking tour was already beginning to tell on him. Perhaps it was mental. He was certainly beginning to feel more than his age. His wrist-watch told him that it was tea-time, but there was no prospect of tea for him that day. He liked a good tea, and thought with longing of the tea table in the library at Bally Cavan House. The hissing urn, the large sensible brown teapot out of which his mother poured tea into large sensible cups fit for large sensible men, plates of home-made bread, butter straight from the churn, honey in the comb, brown scones, possibly potato cakes, certainly a home-made cake or two.

He grunted as he thought of these far-off delights and paused to quench his thirst at a chilly trickling stream. He had had his fill of mountain water that day. What a wretched substitute water was for every other beverage! Moodily shifting the knapsack into a slightly less uncomfortable position he continued on his way.

The path gradually widened out into an oasis of pastureland. A few wooden houses with heavy sloping roofs were clustered together on the flower-sprinkled grass. There were cows browsing, and a barefoot girl driving a flock of geese out of a shed. The houses reminded him of the cuckoo clock in the schoolroom at home. The air was warm and still. He wished that this was the end of his day's journey and that he was going to spend the night in this peaceful and secluded place. Anyhow he decided that the moment had come to have some

liquid refreshments. It would make a new man of him. He took his handbook of conversational German out of his pocket and muttering a few words to himself, advanced towards the largest of the houses and looked through an open door into a dark, clean room. In the corner was a big stove, and on the wooden walls were small religious pictures, and forks and spoons neatly arranged in brackets, while from the raftered roof hung hooks ready for the winter hams. At the table sat a comely woman knitting and rocking a cradle with her foot. She turned and looked at Dan with the benignity of a friendly cow. He made a movement to lift his hat, was disconcerted to find only a handkerchief on his head, removed it rapidly, forgot his sentence and was reduced to saying "Gnädige Frau" and pointing to his mouth. There were a few moments of verbal confusion, then, anxious to help, she began to lay a little meal for him, a couple of the immaculate spoons and forks were fetched off the wall and a giant sausage emerged from a press. He fumbled with his book of words and finally with a smile managed to say, "I only wish to drink not to eat."

This was not true. He always wished to eat, and never more so than at the moment, but to save expense, he knew that he must finish up the plum cake. He fished it out of his knapsack and laid it on the table, drinking down a glass of creamy milk and eating a piece of cake, while his amiable hostess overwhelmed him with conversation. From time to time he nodded gravely and said "Ja." He had not

the least idea what she was talking about, but he was quite sure that one ought meekly to agree with anything that this excellent specimen of womanhood chose to say. Suddenly there was a sound of whimpering from the occupant of the cradle and the room was rent with yells. Dan watched with alarm and respect while his hostess went to the cradle, firmly and tenderly lifted what appeared to be a fine young lobster out of its spotless wrappings and went through a series of evolutions, finally laying it face downwards across her broad knee, where it remained at last quiescent under her rhythmic pats, its goggly eyes fixed on Dan with an appraising stare. He came to the conclusion, not for the first time (for he was an uncle and a godfather) that babies were inferior in charm to infant beasts, but he said obsequiously to its mother, "Herr Stork," thereby utilising the only example of German folk-lore of which he had ever heard. The mother beamed with delight. She had already taken a fancy to Dan, and this unusual flight of imagination on his part endeared him to her for ever. When he rose to go and offered to pay for his drink, she refused with such firmness that he was only able to leave a bright new 50 pf. bit which he placed on the baby's plump back with the words, "Für das Fraulein." She retorted proudly, "Nein, nein, es ist ein Junge!"

He sat for five minutes on the steps outside smoking a pipe and poring over his map, and at last decided that next day he would make for the main road. This short cut which he was taking had been

indicated to him by the waiter, and it was certainly pleasanter walking than on the "hard high," but tomorrow he must think seriously about getting lifts. He hoped to shorten the journey to Italy considerably by this means. It was half past four, so he fetched his knapsack, said good-bye, and leaving the cool little room and his pleasant hostess returned reluctantly to his enforced intercourse with Nature. Without enthusiasm, he tramped on mechanically, looking at nothing in particular and thinking about nothing in particular, only stopping now and then to shift his knapsack or fill his pipe. Once he paused for quite a long time to stare down at a sweeping view of forest and lakes, and once he congratulated himself that he had not been put into a line regiment —for by now he was convinced that there was something radically wrong with his feet.

A few hours later he was surprised to hear voices singing ahead of him, breaking the stillness of the forest. He quickened his dragging footsteps and came upon a clearing in the trees.

"Ein, zwei, drei," sang a large band of men, women and children who were engaged in doing rhythmic exercises. They trolled loudly, tunefully and with conviction, bent, advanced a step, threw their arms in the air, came to attention, and bent again. Some bent with greater ease than others, there were lean youths and fat elderly men; eton-cropped, athletic-looking girls and massive matrons, who had evidently once belonged to the old régime of "Kirche, Kinder and Küche." Nature had not in-

tended them to indulge in these musical gambols, but indulge they were patently determined to, with all the thoroughness of their Germanic nature.

They were sunburnt and almost cooked to a turn, and practically stark naked. Foreheads shone, eyes rolled, mouths opened in fish-like gulps, chests heaved, feet stamped, for they were full of the joy of living.

Dan overwhelmed by this mass display of the human anatomy remained rooted to the spot. The atmosphere was solid with concentration. Dan's wafty mind was positively stunned by it. He leant up against a tree and watched them with astonishment, his sudden appearance having passed unnoticed. The stripped platoons bounced and padded backwards and forwards, their voices ringing lustily through the forest glade. They were under the command of a tall, exceptional-looking individual in shorts, with a forehead like an auk's egg, surmounted by a whirl of tow-coloured hair. He howled out directions and waved his arms with a fervour that made Dan blush for him. It was indecent, he thought with disapproval, for a fellow to let himself go like that in public!

Suddenly the drilling stopped at the word "Halt!" and the ordered lines broke into chatty groups. Some of the fatter brethren sank to the ground and lay flat on their faces gasping like stranded whales, the children burst into gleeful cries and chased each other amongst their recumbent elders. A young woman with long dark plaits and a handsome brown

face drew the attention of the master of the ceremonies to Dan's presence, and in a second he was the centre of attention. The man with tow-coloured hair advanced purposefully towards him, took off his pince-nez, wiped them on the edge of his abbreviated garment and smiling pleasantly, began to speak in German. Dan edging away said defensively, "Nicht sprechen the Deutsch, English." His hand was seized and warmly shaken and the German broke enthusiastically into super-correct English. "I am glad to find that you are English, sir, because it is a language that I speak freely and that I am always pleased to practise. My name is Professor Otto Ringelnatz. Coming as you do from an athletic nation you will at least sympathise with one of the aims of this Order. We are the young Germany. We are the new Ideal. We come out from the cities to find health and beauty, to climb the mountain of self-education in the hope of attaining the peak of authority and responsibility. These youth-sections of ours, as well as incorporating in themselves a fiery protest of the soul against materialism, and striving to cultivate the harmony of group life, also cultivate the body.

"It is this aspect of our youth culture that will interest you as an Englishman. We try to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of cooked food and heavy clothing." He glanced pityingly at Dan. His fingers were obviously itching to tear off the newcomer's blazer and shirt, and to display his chest to the beneficial rays of the sinking sun. "I admit

that when we perform exercises men and women together, we clothe ourselves fully as you see." (Dan opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again. After all everyone had a right to their own opinions.) "When the sexes are segregated, as for instance during the sunbaths, we divest ourselves of all garments and return to nature. One is still obliged to respect certain conventions, though next year, Herr Bruno and I hope to have trained the minds of our disciples sufficiently so that they will no longer see harm in the beautiful human body." He paused breathless and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

Dan had never had so much unwanted information handed out to him in so short a space of time even at school, and that was saying a good deal.

For something to say he asked, "Are you a religious sect?" then immediately wished that he had not spoken. The Professor's eyes lit up with a fanatical gleam, and he in his turn rapped out a question, "My young friend, have you heard of the 'Bund freier Jugendbewegung'?"

"Can't say that I have."

"Well, then, I have a great deal to explain to you. You must understand that the original Jugendbewegung, or to give them their other title, the Wandervogel or Wander Birds were young heroes who fled to the forests and wild places to escape from the comfortable chains of convention and civilisation."

Dan, wildly clutching at thoughts of John the

Baptist and the "Valkyrie," felt justified in breaking in hurried, "Oh, yes, of course. I've got it! I know the chaps you mean."

The Professor eyed him intently for a second, then deceived by his look of bland ingenuousness continued, "In that case you will understand when I tell you that we are an unofficial offshoot of the 'Bund freier Jugendbewegung.' I will not attempt to conceal from you that there has been regrettable conflict with head-quarters. It has been our endeavour to break away still further from the non-essentials. We seek to smell out the rhythmic basis of life—or should I say sense out? As I have told you we love the protective warmth of the group system."

He paused and looked round at his admiring followers who had gradually gathered round to listen and to look at Dan.

Somebody suggested something in German, and the Professor nodded approvingly. "My comrade here has suggested that as it is the hour for us to gather in our camp and practise our handicrafts before the evening repast, you might like to come with us. We have a camp five minutes from here. Come, I will show you. I perceive that you are on a walking tour in our beautiful forest. That is very good, but you have got too many clothes on. You should take all this off, and walk as heaven intended you to."

"I don't think heaven intended me to walk at all," Dan answered, but ill-timed joking was wasted on

the Professor, who caught him up sharply with the words, "You are mistaken if I may say so. Else what were we given legs for? But we will go now and inspect the camp." He took his arm and led him through the trees. They were followed by a crowd of Nature-seekers. Naked children capered round them and a stalwart young woman with large feet, and clad in a singlet and pants, tried to engage Dan in guttural French. He became hot all over, and would have liked to have escaped from this chaste imitation of a bacchanalia. He kept his eyes fixed on the ground, there was no temptation for him to do otherwise. He had never seen such a collection of stout legs in his life. "Regular Mulingar heifers," he thought with shocked distaste.

The camp consisted of a collection of tents near a pool which had water lilies floating on it. The trees round it were reflected in its glassy green surface. The air was perfumed with the balmy smell of pines. A faint cooing of wood pigeons throbbed in the silence. Dan thought that the Nature-seekers rather spoilt the picture. Pity that they weren't a better-looking lot.

They were now diving into their tents, emerging again with hand looms, half-finished pottery bowls, raffia work, leather and stencilling implements, basket and wool work, and all the other products of misguided amateur arts and crafts. They began to arrange themselves in circles with a good deal of talk and some frolicsomeness among the younger members. Dan stood for a moment staring round

him with curiosity. The Professor was inviting him to spend the night with them, but he refused politely, upon which the German disappeared into a tent, returned with a large visiting card, on which was engraved,

Professor Otto Ringelnatz,
Heinrich Strasse, München

and gave it to Dan with the words, "When next you visit Germany you must come and see me. This is my address." Dan replied with cheap amiability, "Yes, and if you're ever in Ireland you must come and look me up." The Professor's eyes lit up. "Ireland! So you live in Ireland? Please to give me your address. Karl! Paper and pencil!" A young Nature-seeker rushed out of a tent bearing implements, and a second later Dan had written the name of his ancestral home in a note book. The Professor examined it carefully and remarked, "Your writing is difficult, if you do not mind me saying so, but I can read it. I am probably visiting your beautiful country soon. I am lecturing on The New Germany in Dublin. If time permits, I shall make every effort to avail myself of your kind hospitality." Then followed compliments and adieux.

Dan, as he followed the path away into the solitary depths of the forest, felt vaguely apprehensive. He saw that the Herr Professor was a man of his word. What he did not dare to visualise was his father's face as the old butler ushered this overwhelmingly vital specimen of New Germany into

the library of Bally Cavan House. What clothes would the fellow wear, or leave off, for the South of Ireland? But here he took refuge in what Aunt Maureen was fond of describing as "Dan's ostrich-like habit of refusing to face facts."

A few hours later it was growing dark in the forest. The golden evening light was fading, and through a gap in the trees he saw the moon silhouetted against the pale, clear sky, waiting for the advent of the night. He came on a wayside shrine, and looked in. It was a miniature chapel with an altar decked with offerings of wild flowers. Sitting down on one of the few benches, he lifted his knapsack off and put it down on the floor. He felt unutterably weary, dirty and disconsolate. To think that there were days and days more of this! Tomorrow was the day when he ought to have been arriving in Palermo if he had stayed his week in London and travelled by the ordinary route. The ordinary route! However, it was no use thinking of the ordinary route now. What a knack he seemed to have for putting his feet into it! If only he could get clear of this journey he would start off fresh. He had no intention of crying over spilt milk, or of agreeing with any of Aunt Maureen's insinuations, but all the same he did intend to make and to keep a few resolutions when he finally came to his journey's end. For instance he was undoubtedly a bit too casual . . . perhaps Pelmanism or book-keeping would remedy this. . . . He sat for a long time lost in gloomy thoughts, then his mind grad-

ually became a blank, and realising there was no more meditating to be done that evening, he roused himself at last, left the chapel, and moving reverently a few yards off, sat down to eat his supper. When he opened his knapsack he found, besides the remains of the cake, a fine red sausage and a loaf of bread placed there by his late hostess. A grin broke over his weary countenance. He deeply regretted having no beer to drink, but he no longer felt so depressed. After all, most people were pretty decent on the whole, even foreigners. It really did not do to take things too hard.

After his meal he wandered on through the moonlit woods in search of a suitable place in which to spend the night. The forest was a black cup filled to overflowing with silver wine. The faint rasping of insects and the mysterious cracklings of the night denizens of the undergrowth made no impression on the vast silence of the spellbound world. A sinister, unearthly universe, with no comfort in it for human beings. He tried to conjure up the thought of Fiona with her friendly glance, but even she seemed unreal, a wan nymph flying from him into the moonlight and disappearing into impenetrable darkness.

He was disconcerted to find that it was hard for him to visualise his beloved's face and form. But his conviction of being in love did not waver. A feeling of submerged exhilaration was his assurance. He felt a different being from the Dan Cavanagh who had boarded the train at Cologne, older, more experienced, superior in every way. He did not

want to be strait-laced, but he was positively sorry for poor old Cad, spliced up to the night-club Pearl. He found a sandy hollow under a rock, lowered the knapsack from his shoulders, rolled his trench coat into a pillow, lay down and spread the Derby handkerchief over his face. He had heard that moonlight affected the brain unfavourably. "I can't afford to be more balmy than I am already," he thought as he composed himself to sleep.

VII

THE INN

HORATIO SWANN, the famous portrait painter, was at his wit's end. Harry Ames, the well-known scene designer, was at his wit's end. The Russian chauffeur, Boris, was lying upstairs under a neat check bedspread, in a bedroom of the inn, suffering from an overdose of cocaine. The only person who was enjoying himself was Gene Tunney the panther who, attached to the kitchen table by a stout chain, was guzzling his luncheon out of a wash-hand-basin. In the entrance hall of the inn, the Princess Vanda Fiorivanti stormed to and fro. Her tall, snake-like figure clad in a pair of sea-green pyjamas and a fur coat, quivered with rage. Her enormous, distraught yellow eyes, ringed with black lashes, appeared to swamp her emaciated white face. Her hair was like a crazy scarlet chrysanthemum and matched her scarlet mouth. Her general appearance at the moment closely resembled that of a vampire who had been carelessly buried without a stake in her heart, dug up again after some centuries, and was now giving vent to her feelings. The forest inn rang with her polyglot cries, as she paced backwards and forwards. Ear-rings swaying, bracelets

jangling, she cursed in Italian, English, French and German. Her outpourings in this last language fell on unfruitful ground, the square-faced little hotel proprietor having long since retired into an inner bureau, where with indignant hands he was making out the bill for this unspeakable party of lunatics that had, like a scourge from heaven, descended upon his peaceful and well-regulated establishment. *Gott sei Dank!* his other guests were out fishing or taking the salubrious air, with the unfortunate exception of the newly-arrived Schmidt family, who, armed with umbrellas and desirous of taking advantage of a fine spell to sample the beauties of the surrounding forest had run into this human cyclone in the hall. No wonder that they had clutched their little ones and bundled out through the front door! Entrenched behind the glass door of his office, the inn proprietor listened to the storm of voices, and wondered how it was all going to end. If only they would remove themselves, and above all remove that wild beast that had taken possession of the kitchen, before the other guests returned for their evening meal. But how were they to be got away? How could the colossal snow-white car outside the inn, be induced to move without the aid of that prostrate Slav upstairs, who had collapsed on arrival and had never so much as twitched an eyelid since?

The Princess, agitated by the same question, was shrieking in her vibrating voice for the twentieth time, "How are we to get away from this *sacré chaumière?* You fools! Have you no suggestions

to make? Haven't I told you that I must arrive at Erlenburg to-morrow? This delay is driving me mad! You must drag that Russian beast off the bed and if necessary tie him to the steering wheel. He must drive! He will drive! He shall drive! He is quite free to die when we arrive at the castle, as far as I am concerned. Go and tell him, Horatio, that I wish to start in five minutes. Five minutes! Do you hear? *Cinq* minutes! *Tu comprends? Amène toi!* Ahhrr!" She gave an exasperated moan and flung herself into a chair, her huge, savage eyes rolling in her head. Horatio Swann stroked his beard, and said nastily in his deep, velvet-toned voice:

"I fancy, my dear lady, that even you can hardly seriously wish to be motored across Central Europe by a declared drug fiend. I can't imagine why you ever engaged him in the first instance. The slightest knowledge of phrenology would have told you that an individual with sloping ears like that was bound to be a degenerate. I knew at once as soon as I saw him, that there was *something* that I didn't like about the fellow, even though I couldn't perhaps have told you why exactly, or put my finger on the spot. However," he rolled out emphatically at her, "that handsome, virginal-looking car outside there belongs to you—paid for by your money. Beautiful cheque! Beautiful price! 'Thank you, Madame! here's your car.' I can imagine the whole scene! All this is a mere bagatelle to people like you. People like you—the glory and the shame of our

European civilisation. Certainly, go on your way if you like. Let that monster upstairs convey you along at the same murderous speed that you brought me here from Paris by. Tearing through God's forest! Massacring the innocent dogs and chickens, all more worthy and likely than you or I to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But don't ask me to accompany you! I'm near enough to the next world as it is, without wishing to poke my aquiline nose prematurely into it."

La Fiorivanti, who had reached boiling point again during this leisurely monologue, rose and curving her long neck and fixing him with a diabolical look, hissed between her teeth, "Strange, that I should have two apparently normal men in my party—I suppose that you are normal?" she interposed spitefully—"two apparently normal men and yet neither of them are able to drive a car! A thing that every school boy can do. Ah, well, I suppose that I must make up my mind to rot in this abominable black forest for the rest of my life!"

With long, fierce, jewelled fingers she lit a cigarette, then burst into peals of hysterical laughter, "Ah! Ah! *C'est rigolo!*" She sounded like a hyena, hovering on the verge of a nervous breakdown. It was too much for Horatio Swann, who was elderly, highly-strung and had motored far and fast during the last twenty-four hours. He pressed one of his hands to his deep-set eyes and turned away. He yearned to be back in Paris, surrounded

by his famous portraits and his devoted admirers. World famous though he was, he found it impossible to carry about with him the particular atmosphere compounded of peace and appreciation which he found necessary for his macabre art, and he seldom left the semi-sacrosanct shrine that his peculiarly profane genius had created for him in the midst of Parisian society. But whatever faults he possessed he was a good friend, and the Princess had needed him on this trip, so he had come, and incidentally had never ceased grumbling.

Harry Ames was also a well-known artist in his own line, his stage designs being celebrated in the theatrical world, but he was still more of a business man, and he never allowed his temper to interfere with his plans. This opportunity of designing the scenery for Rex Guggenheim's forthcoming super-spectacle, "The Legend of St. Dorothea and the Heavenly Roses," in which the Princess was to take the leading part, was not to be tampered with or delayed. He was determined to arrive in good time at Schloss Erlenburg in the Tyrol for the preliminary consultations which were to take place there before the rehearsals in Berlin.

Though subdued from lack of food, and ruffled by the scene that he had just passed through, he composed his jolly red face to a cheery smile and, squaring his big shoulders, advanced upon the Princess.

"What's the good of all this fuss? We'll go on by train. It's quite simple." The Princess turned

and demolished him with a glance. Her voice suddenly dropped to a note of feline sweetness, "Ah, ha!" she cooed, "so I am to leave my nice new car behind in this dirty little inn? What a clev-ar idea. *C'est beau!*"

Her eyes suddenly overflowed with temper and she came a step nearer. Harry Ames fell back as she broke out at the top of her voice.

"It is your fault, the whole thing! It is you who ought to be able to drive us! Horatio is only an old corpse. He is as good as dead. But you are young, strong, and yet you cannot drive. Oh! it passes comprehension!" She turned to Horatio Swann and shrugged her shoulders, *"D'abord il m'a paru intelligent, mais j'arrive à me rendre compte qu'il n'est pas très fin."*

Harry Ames had not had time in his busy, successful life, to learn much French, or to learn a great deal about women, but he understood enough of both to realise that he had put his foot in it. He showed his mortification by drawing himself up to his full height of six feet, throwing out his chest and looking over the top of his companions' heads, as if to say, "I'm too tall to see you."

La Fiorivanti placed a trembling hand on Horatio Swann's shoulder. "I am going to rest upstairs. Come and talk to me, *mon ami.*" He kissed the tips of her fingers gallantly, "No, dear Vanda," he replied in a soothing voice, "I mustn't disturb your siesta with my senile cacklings. You'll come down all the more radiant for your temporary seclusion.

Meanwhile your devoted servants will talk over tiresome plans." She flashed a grateful look at him and rushed upstairs, where her voice could be heard calling imperiously, "Bianca! *Dov'é la mia camera?*"

It was only when a door banged overhead that the two men below were able to breathe freely. Horatio Swann eyed Harry Ames and laughed sardonically, "I admired your courage in trying to bell the cat just now. Rather a desperate venture! When you have known our lovely companion as long as I have, you'll think before you speak. Beautiful women are not placed in this world to argue with. They have one or two other uses. Haven't you found that out yet, my boy?"

Harry Ames remained unmoved and replied rudely, "Oh, as far as that goes, I've no use for skimmed milk."

"And who are you to turn up your nose at an international beauty of fifteen years' standing?" growled Horatio Swann disagreeably.

"Yes, she's stood a bit too long for my taste." Then, in an effort not to lose his temper Harry Ames added, "However, she's a striking-looking woman. Marvellous eyes and wonderful figure."

Horatio Swann stroked his Velasquez-like beard and narrowed his intensely blue eyes. His voice was charged with contempt, "Pretty pass things have come to when one's juniors begin telling one La Fiorivanti's points. *One* who has painted her fifteen times, and every time a masterpiece, so those

despicable creatures the art critics say, but of course you know better than they do."

Harry Ames made a belated attempt to appease the infuriated master with a hearty, "Of course, she must make a splendid portrait. The one you did of her last year in the nude wearing golden boots, shook Europe. Unfortunately, I was too busy to get over to Paris to see it."

"Shook Europe! It *would* please all you imbecilic smut-hounds. Abominable and pornographic daub! I did it for her birthday, to console her for the death of a favourite dog. She went on like a mad woman about the poor little animal. Of course it died of neglect as I told her at the time, but I had enough common sense to know that one's own mistakes are the hardest to bear, so I painted her and she enjoyed the sensation and talk, poor woman. They live on advertisement and commotion, that type, just like the gnat in *Alice through the Looking Glass,* who lived on wedding cake. And *you'd* like the advertisement, too, only you've the wrong sort of looks. You're the farmer type. Never cuts any ice in cosmopolitan society, I fear."

Harry Ames glared at him, then snarls from the kitchen and the sound of a chair falling, broke up their enjoyable *tête à tête.* Ames stalked across the hall remarking, "Gene Tunney! Shall I fetch him?"

"Better not! Like mistress, like beast. Wants an experienced hand. He knows me and is accustomed to see me at any hour of the day or night." He disappeared, and returned leading the panther

who was licking greasy chops and had a skittish look in its eye.

Harry Ames, who had no illusions about the brute creations, stepped gingerly back. At the same moment, the glass door of the bureau was flung abruptly open and the proprietor came out, bristling with determination and excitement. Keeping one eye on Gene Tunney, who appeared to be grinning at him, he said in a rasping voice: "Here is your bill. I must request you all to leave within the hour or I shall be obliged to ring up the police at Stunzen. I must ask you meanwhile to keep that wild animal out of the hotel as the maids refuse to prepare the evening meal as long as he is here. Will you also please see that the lady remains upstairs till the hour of departure. My guests will be returning soon from their walks. This is a respectable family hotel and her attire would cause scandal. That is all that I have to say." He retired into his office and banged the door. Horatio Swann raised his bushy eyebrows.

"Ha! Germany's ultimatum to our Anglo-Italian alliance. Now we are in the soup. It's all very well for that little pot-bellied person demanding that ladies should be kept in their rooms and that panthers should be taken out of the house. Easier said than done. Why, by the way, this scurrilous attack on a panther? One of the noblest beasts in creation. Certainly the cleanest living member of *this* party."

Harry Ames's bold brown eyes flashed and he became very red in the face, "I think that non-

proven. The point is, we've got to make some sort of a plan to get away from here. We don't want to have trouble with the police."

"No, no!" replied Horatio Swann thoughtfully, "nasty word, *police*. Come along! It's stopped raining now. Let's take Gene Tunney out."

He gathered up the panther's chain and sauntered to the hall door, "Hallo, who is that meddling with the car?"

A tall young man in dilapidated grey flannel trousers and a blazer, with a knapsack on his back, was bending with interest over the steering wheel, staring at the luxurious profusion of gadgets on the switch board. He looked up. Horatio Swann thought, "Ah, ha! nice-looking young fellow. Distinctly paintable. Good figure. No doubt that these horrible games do produce good lines in the young of both sexes." Dan saw a handsome old gentleman with a piercing glance, wearing odd shoes, and with him a large, red-faced fellow in plus fours and a loudly-patterned pullover. He saw that the latter at any rate was English, and grinning at them remarked apologetically: "This your car? She *is* a beauty. I bet she can shift a bit, can't she?"

Horatio Swann gave one of his more agreeable laughs. "If by shifting you mean moving along at a diabolical speed, you are certainly right in theory, but in practice she is as immovable as L'Arc de Triomphe."

Dan asked with concern, "Anything serious? Not the big end gone I hope?"

Harry Ames gave him a sharp glance. "Do you know anything about cars? Can you drive?"

"Yes," asked Horatio Swann slowly, knitting his eyebrows and fixing Dan with a singularly searching look. "Can you drive? Declare yourself!"

"Oh, rather," answered Dan airily, "never happier than when I'm at the odd wheel." This was not strictly true, as his experience of cars had so far been confined to a Baby Austin belonging to his sister-in-law Dorothy Cavanagh (he had never been allowed to touch the family car) but he was tired-out and felt that a little swanking would do him good. "Doing a walking tour?" pursued Horatio Swann with a geniality that amazed Harry Ames, who had only known the world-famous painter for three days, and had spent those three days smarting under the lash of his tongue.

"Well . . . hardly. I'm walking to Italy."

"Italy. Don't you call that a walking tour?"

Dan's eyes screwed up into a smile. He said emphatically, "Well, my idea of a walking tour is something that one does *for* pleasure, *from* choice."

Horatio Swann grunted approval of this remark, and after stroking his beard for a second, handed Gene Tunney's chain imperiously to the reluctant Harry Ames, and invited Dan to come in and have a cup of coffee.

"Thanks, sir," he replied, and followed him into the inn.

Horatio Swann was accustomed to deal either

kindly or unkindly, according to his fancy, with every type of person from bargees with good torsos, to fashionable beauties with bad moods. His persuasive charm was almost as renowned as his stinging tongue. His complex character was made up of many facets, all of them genuine. Over a steaming cup of coffee, Dan was given suitable glimpses into the famous painter's past that inspired confidence, and increased his liking for this aristocratic-looking old boy. "My name is Horatio Swann," his companion announced in his deep, caressing voice, then paused instinctively for the gasp of awe that almost invariably greeted the disclosure of his identity. Dan, feeling that he was being very sociable asked politely, "Any relation of Major Tom Swann, who was master of the Auchtolony Foxhounds? I stayed with them once in Galway during the holidays. Had a ripping time."

Swann eyed him meditatively and remarked, "Irish, are you?"

"Yes, my name's Cavanagh."

"Of course! A fellow called Cavanagh was in the same house with me at Harrow in the days before the flood."

"That's father!" exclaimed Dan, thrown off his perch at finding that this eccentric old gentleman had been at a public school, and surprised in the usual manner of offspring at realising that their parents have really once been young. The portrait painter had carefully omitted to mention that his stay at the famous school had lasted exactly one

term, at the end of which, at the age of fourteen and a half, he had run away to study his art in Paris.

Quarter of an hour later (they were both talkers and slow ones), Horatio Swann had learnt the story of Dan's trans-Germanic journey to Sicily. Dan, thanks to his powers of narrative, gave a very satisfactory account of his wanderings. Without departing in any way from the truth, he recounted with great solemnity and many worthy comments, the tale of his unfortunate odyssey. Without letting anyone else down (not even the despicable Cadwalleder) he managed to keep his own end up. Horatio Swann, genuinely moved to sympathy, nodded emphatically from time to time. "I read between the lines. You very decently exonerate your parents from all blame, but I can see that it is the usual case of youth up against age. You are quite right to strain every sinew to secure this post. I've heard all about the Wansteads of Sicily. Good people, good wine, and I daresay that they give good fat cheques to their henchmen. You must certainly not lose this opportunity of consolidating your position in life." Then after a moment's silence, he made Dan a proposition that had germinated in his fertile mind the moment that he had seen the young man bending with an apparently knowledgeable air over the car. Interested motives had first suggested the idea, but now a sincere wish to help him prompted him to unfold his plan. Very simply, as one man of the world to another, he related to him the dis-

tressing predicament in which his party had been placed by the sudden collapse of a drug-taking Russian chauffeur. The car and the chauffeur belonged to a very lovely and well-known lady, the Princess Vanda Fiorivanti, wife of Prince Andrea Fiorivanti, a member of the historical Roman family. The Princess was on her way to take the leading part in an important theatrical production called "The Legend of St. Dorothea and the Heavenly Roses," the plans for which were being discussed at Schloss Erlenburg in the Tyrol, the home of the great producer, Rex Guggenheim. Later on the miracle play was to be produced in Berlin and then to be brought to London, Paris and New York.

He mentioned casually that he himself was an old friend of the Princess' and had come with her from Paris to give her the benefit of his companionship and advice. It was most important that they should arrive at Schloss Erlenburg as soon as possible, as urgent private affairs called the Princess on to Rome in a few days' time.

She had planned to motor all the way. "Her distress is really pitiful to behold. She is lying upstairs weeping her eyes out." He paused and rolled a cigarette for himself. He did not look up, but he had already guessed the fatal ease with which this young man could throw himself into other people's troubles, so he was not surprised when Dan said in a voice warm with sympathy:

"Oh, I say! What septic luck! What a foul fellow that shover must be. Can't he be pulled

together somehow or other? Have you tried pouring cold water over him?"

"He's past first aid remedies. He'll have to be sent back to Paris and incarcerated in a hospital or an asylum—possibly a prison. No! he's out of the picture."

At this juncture the scowling proprietor popped out of his office and seemed about to speak, but Horatio Swann with overpowering hauteur waved him back. "Go away if you please! I'll speak to you later."

Then to Dan, "Now, my boy, you have been sent here to help us and we have been sent here to help you. You want to get to Italy soon and we want to get to Italy soon. We have got the car and no driving ability and you have got the driving ability and no car. Come on? You must drive us. Do not argue with me. You are not going to fail the Princess, are you?" Horatio Swann laid his hand dramatically on his shoulder and looked like an apostle trying to convert a doubting young pagan.

Dan's eyes glistened with excitement. He made a valiant effort not to lose his head. . . . But after all was not this a heaven-sent chance? Then, with his lightning-like power of arriving at decisions that was almost Napoleonic, he said, "Yes, sir, I'll come, but can I take the car for a run first before we start?"

After a wash-up and a shave, he strode confidently out of the inn, with Horatio Swann's enthusiastic thanks ringing in his ears, and stood for a few sec-

onds contemplating the car. He felt a buoyancy of heart that he had not experienced since leaving Fiona. Things were coming right at last! The end of this journey was in sight. He was to complete it not on foot and alone, but in a manner and a company that could only be described as O.K.

One of the most satisfactory features of this new development was that he was now at length financially independent. Horatio Swann, with infinite tact and delicacy had indicated that he must of course, for the time that he was driving them, accept the six pounds a week that the Princess was accustomed to pay as wages to the chauffeur. Dan had protested half-heartedly but Horatio Swann had said impatiently, "Never refuse honest money, my boy! False pride is sickening. Anyhow it is only for a week."

Furthermore the situation was of the most romantic and interesting, for he was rescuing a princess, a beautiful, young and distressed princess. He felt all aglow with anticipation.

Jumping into the car he applied himself with reckless determination to the task of mastering it. He searched for, and just as he was giving up hope, found the self-starter, and the great, white monster broke into a deep, soft throb. It seemed to be waiting contemptuously for him to master the secret of its gears.

There followed five minutes of agonising indecision, and a desperate attempt at concentration, that was quite foreign to his nature. The car started

to life, then sank groaning into apathy. It repeated this performance about half a dozen times. He broke into profuse perspiration and curses. This was indeed different from the Baby Austin!

Suddenly the huge car sprang forward. "She's off!" he muttered gripping the steering wheel. He ground sacrilegiously into second, failed to swing the car round sufficiently, crashed into a couple of saplings that happened to be in the way, righted himself with a supreme effort and found himself shooting down the narrow road on top gear without quite knowing how he had done it.

The car was rapidly gaining control of the situation. Purring joyously, it headed for an approaching hair-pin bend, or was it that the corner was rushing at it? Dan jammed on the first brakes that came to hand, shaved destruction by a few inches and swung the heavy machine round onto the straight. The next corner he took in better style. He was beginning to get the feel of the car, and it had flashed across his flustered consciousness that it was safer not to accelerate quite so generously with a Pannonia-Svitza as with an Austin Seven.

The car gobbled up the three deserted miles between the inn and the main road, and the pedestrians who were not there were indeed blessed. Dan paid tribute to the sight of the broad highway which burst on him with disconcerting unexpectedness, by pressing the electric horn for the first time. A stupendous wail burst forth, causing him to swerve

violently as he coerced the Pannonia-Svitza into taking the crown of the road rather than the bank. . . .

Meanwhile, the Princess' party had gathered in the bare inn dining room, dressed for travel; that is to say the Princess had added to her pyjamas and white fur coat costume, a pair of long Russian boots of scarlet leather and a diaphanous green veil that she had tied round her flaming hair. Bianca, the sloe-eyed Venetian maid, was seated at another table trying to keep Gene Tunney in a good humour by addressing him in endearing terms.

Horatio Swann had donned an overcoat with an astrakhan collar, and Harry Ames had buttoned himself into a faithful trench coat that had done service with him during the war. He had thrown out his chest and was saying curtly:

"Well, it's your funeral! Hope he hasn't gone off with the car. After all we don't know anything about him. If you'd asked my advice, I'd have vetoed the idea, but when I came back from my walk with that confounded animal I found the whole thing arranged."

Horatio Swann's eyes narrowed as he addressed the younger man with measured scorn. "You were not consulted because it does not happen to be your affair. I am looking after the Princess. She has honoured me by placing her person in my charge. *Enfoncez vous bien cela dans la tête.*"

The Princess moaned like a lost soul.

"*Ah! mes enfants, taisez vous donc, je vous en*

prie! My head is splittering. *Je suis au bout de mes forces.* Horatio! Where is this young man that you promised me?"

She spoke and looked like a primeval goddess, waiting for a sacrifice.

"Yes, where is the fellow?" insisted Ames aggressively.

Like an answer to prayer Dan, flushed and hilarious, burst in an excited manner into the room.

"Well, sir, I've had her out! I think I can guarantee to take you along all right without smashing you up too badly."

Horatio Swann turned to the Princess.

"Here he is! Your new chauffeur. May I present him to you? Mr. Cavanagh—the Princess Vanda Fiorivanti."

Dan bowed gallantly but absent-mindedly. He experienced a feeling of astonishment and disappointment at the exotic and haggard appearance of his princess-employer (gone was his vision of a musical-comedy princess!), but he was too absorbed in the Pannonia-Svitza at the moment to take much interest in the looks of any woman.

The Princess rolled her wild eyes at him.

"I am glad, I am very glad that you are driving us. Your face inspires me with confidence. I find that everything Horatio proposes works well. But you must be careful not to do an injury to the car because it is a very beautiful one given to me by a very dear, dear friend."

Dan was impressed, unaware that the number of

the Princess' "dear, dear friends" was reputed to run into double figures.

He turned to Horatio Swann and said importantly:

"We've got enough petrol to do about sixty miles. Oil all right too, and I've filled her up with a can of water that I got out of one of the fraus in the kitchen."

Horatio Swann laughed loudly.

"How do you know that they are all matrons? You are going to have a wonderful life if you work at this rate!"

Harry Ames snorted.

"And how do we know that this young fellow is going to be able to drive us safely to the Tyrol?"

Dan turned on him with an aggressive glint in his green eyes.

"Afraid you'll have to risk it."

He was not going to allow any interference between him and the great white queen of cars. He was now her devotee, soon he hoped to be her master.

Their departure shortly afterwards from the inn was spectacular in the extreme and was witnessed with amazed disapproval by a group of hotel residents. To begin with, Gene Tunney refused at the last moment to leave the inn. He had smelt the savoury preparations for the evening meal, and had to be dragged, struggling and grunting, across the threshold by Horatio Swann and Bianca.

The Princess, who had got her second wind, was

screaming directions indiscriminately at everyone. Harry Ames was rummaging in the deep well at the back of the car under the impression that he had lost a treasured walking stick. Dan, almost beside himself with nervous anticipation, had already forgotten where the self-starter was, and had inadvertently switched on the blindingly powerful headlights which lit up the damp, surrounding forest with a garish brilliance, and had called forth murmurs of "Himmel!" from the onlookers. He switched them off hurriedly again and after feverish fumblings among the bewildering array of gadgets, managed to start the engine. He heaved a sigh of relief, and dreading, and yet longing to be off, turned masterfully to his passengers.

"I say, hadn't we better shove off and get the rest of the daylight? Will you sit beside me, sir, as you've got the map?" (this anxiously in a low voice to Horatio Swann).

The Princess gave him a flashing smile. "Good boy . . . I like you!" she shot at him with the coyness of a tigress as, swathed in furs, she sank into the back of the car. Harry Ames took his place beside her. Bianca bundled Gene Tunney and herself into the folding seats in front. Horatio Swann, after some haughty last moment instructions to the proprietor as to the fate of Boris, the drug-fiend, settled himself with dignity next to Dan. He pulled his felt hat down well over his eyes and began to open a motoring map with slow deliberation.

"Now, my son, let us tackle this question of direction. I propose . . ." but the words were whipped out of his mouth—the Pannonia-Svitza had lurched forward and they were off!

Accustomed as the party was to the serene and expert technique of the decadent Boris, the first ten minutes of Dan's driving were a positive revelation.

Shrieks came from the Princess. "Stop! Stop! You are killing the gears! This is *effroyable!* Horatio—stop him!"

Harry Ames shouted angrily, "Look out! Mr. Swann, is this safe?"

Horatio Swann gripped the side of the car and gasped, "Cavanagh! is this safe?"

Dan, his blood up, shouted back defiantly: "No! it isn't in the least safe, but I'll settle down in time."

After this, there was nothing for them to do but to close their eyes, shriek out at every corner, and hope despairingly for the best. Their mental anguish was mercifully relieved when they took to the main road. Dan by now had gained partial control of the car and hoped to gain more with every mile.

At last they were humming steadily along the forest-bordered road, and though Dan's treatment of the gears was as sacrilegious as ever, a feeling of faint hope and confidence gradually diffused itself over the cringing occupants of the car.

The anxious watchers behind were strengthened in their favourable impression by observing that Dan

had now slightly relaxed his rigid crouch over the steering wheel, had leant back in his seat and had asked Horatio Swann to fill his pipe for him.

The painter's famous hands trembled with unwonted feebleness, as he complied with this request. He was more than thankful to see that his protégé's grim scowl had turned into that expression of jaunty enjoyment of life that was habitual to him.

He was driving so quietly at the end of twenty miles that La Fiorivanti, who was beginning to suffer from one of her attacks of nervous excitability, suddenly broke out into loud wails. "I am tired of this interminable dark forest and these stupid little villages. Faster! Faster! Faster!"

Dan, remembering an injunction of his eldest brother Alan, never to drive faster than he could think, shook his head pompously.

"Sorry!" he yelled back, "but I'd better take my own pace. We're doing quite well under the circs."

Horatio Swann rebuked him. "*Circumstances* not circs. A pity to pollute your young mouth with these horrible abbreviations."

Dan merely grinned. These people, according to his standards, were all quite mad, but that was not his affair. It was his duty to convey them in safety to this fabulous castle in Austria, that is to say if it really existed, which he was inclined to doubt. Life, he thought, was well worth living with the feel of a car like this under his hands. What a beauty she was! Every hour increased his admiration for this

splendid creature, whose fierce impatience to devour the miles he could hardly curb, and yet who was beginning to respond to his touch.

Why worry?

VIII

THE CASTLE

SCHLOSS ERLENBURG, the favourite residence of the celebrated theatrical producer Rex Guggenheim, is one of the finest castles in the Tyrol. Partly mediæval, partly Renaissance, wholly magnificent, it rises triumphantly from a precipitous spur, against a background of inky forest and the distant ramparts of snow-capped mountains.

On this sweltering June afternoon the sight of its fairy splendour, high up among the hills, only caused to the occupants of the Pannonia-Svitza, as it zigzagged up the side of the valley, the relief that weary travellers experience when approaching a well-recommended hotel. The fatigue of a twenty-four hours' transit through southern Bavaria and the Tyrol at high speed, had reduced every member of the party to a dead level of exhaustion and exasperation. The Princess had temporarily lost the fiery exultation that had possessed her ever since she had fascinated Rex Guggenheim into choosing her out of all the notorious beauties of Europe, to play the part of Saint Dorothea in his forthcoming much-advertised miracle play.

Harry Ames, blessed with an iron constitution,

felt no overpowering physical weariness, but was badly discomposed in the temper. He was sitting in the back of the car, arms crossed, head up in the air, eyes closed. He had not addressed a word to the Princess for about seventy miles. She was lying back sleeping in her corner, her face statuesque in its repose.

Bianca, the maid, had collapsed, huddled in her seat, a handkerchief pressed to her aching forehead. At her feet lay Gene Tunney, reclining on his back in an insolent attitude, his paws affectedly raised in the air. Horatio Swann's handsome head was sunk on his breast in a sombre reverie, one hand automatically clutching the side of the car as they swirled along.

Dan's face was drawn, his mouth was set in a severe line and he was frowning from under his bushy eyebrows at the ascending road which, glaringly white in the sunshine, unwound itself before him. It was nearly twenty-four hours since he had turned chauffeur, and he was beginning to understand why Boris had taken to drugs. It was no joke being at the mercy of the Princess' unreasonable will. She had insisted on an all-night drive and they had sped through the dark, encircling forest until the early hours of the morning, when she had ordered a halt at a small wayside inn.

Dan, after a cup of coffee and some rolls had snatched a couple of hours' sleep on a hard sofa. The advantages of this arrangement had been outbalanced by the awakening. To him every morn-

ing's arising seemed like a rending apart of body and soul, but he had never experienced such excruciating agony as on this occasion when Horatio Swann had shaken him to his senses and he had slouched, yawning, back to the steering wheel.

A few hours later after a second breakfast, he had revived a little, and had felt renewed pleasure in steering the snowy car as it throbbed and strained under his hands.

The morning air was pure and sparkling with sunshine as they had rushed along the broad, straight roads, past sweeps of rich pasture land and woods, wayside crucifixes, and wagons drawn by heavy moving oxen, slowing down through the villages with their white-washed, brightly frescoed houses and their market places, where the fruit stalls were laden with glowing heaps of peaches, plums and grapes.

They had raced on and on through the golden morning, till the June sun rose to its noonday strength. Now by four in the afternoon, Dan was feeling hot, hungry, thirsty, cramped, cross and thoroughly tired out. He clung tenaciously to his one dominant idea which was to convey this "something crew" safely to their "something destination." The sight of Schloss Erlenburg, glorious with its ramparts and pinnacles above the valley, merely drew from him the grumpy comment: "Oh, there's the odd shack at last, is it?"

Quarter of an hour later the Pannonia-Svitza passed through the little village at the foot of the castle, rolled under the portcullis, crossed the great

courtyard, and came to a standstill in front of the flight of wide, stone steps that, flanked by heraldic beasts, led up to the entrance.

Sunlight and silence held the castle as if in a trance. On one of the many towers a flag hung listlessly against its staff. There was no sign of human habitation except where, high up in a turret, an orange shawl hung out of a lattice window against the grey wall.

There was no sound—but the cooing of pigeons.

La Fiorivanti shattered the enchanted silence shrilly. "Blow the horn. Where is everybody? Why is there no one here to greet us? Blow! Mr. Cavanagh. Blow!"

Dan pressed the electric horn and kept it shrieking till the castle walls rang with its strident echo.

As if in answer to it, a pack of wolf hounds and yapping lap-dogs hurled themselves down the steps followed by a couple of footmen.

Gene Tunney came to life and with the light of battle in his eyes tried to spring over the side of the car, and into the midst of his canine hosts, who leapt up to attack him. A painful and alarming scene ensued. Bianca hung desperately onto Gene Tunney's collar. The Princess shrieked and attempted to throw her fragile and notorious form in between the engaging forces. Harry Ames held her down in her seat. Horatio Swann snatched off his slouch hat and beat an hysterical chow-dog about the ears. A footman was bitten in the hand. Dan started the car, jammed her into first, and made a rapid circuit

round the courtyard. The footmen hauled and drove the thwarted hounds back up the steps and then for the second time the Pannonia-Svitza drew up in front of the entrance door.

Now, a short, square-headed man of about forty, in an immaculate grey suit and wearing grey suède shoes came hurrying down to meet them. His round pale face with its shrewd blue eyes expressed concern. He bent over the Princess' hand and addressed her in suave tones pitched in a slight foreign accent.

"Well, Princess, this is a bad beginning. I must apologise for my dogs. They are generally kept out of the way when my visitors arrive. I suppose that it was this picturesque animal of yours that caused the excitement. What are we going to do with it?"

Without waiting for a reply, he turned to a footman and said something in German. Then to the Princess—"Don't worry, Princess. It is all arranged. Now come in and rest yourself. You must be tired. Mr. Swann, it's a great honour for me to have you here. Harry! very pleased to see you again. We must have a long talk later on." His eye lighted on Dan. "And who have we here? The chauffeur?"

The Princess clutched Rex Guggenheim's fat hand. "Mr. Guggenheim, please understand this is not an ordinary mechanic. His face is dirty but he is a gentleman! He is more than a gentleman. He is an act of Providence! As for Boris—" She launched out into an agitated explanation. Rex

Guggenheim, smiling blandly up into her ravaged face, livid in its frame of green veil and scarlet hair, said, "That's all right, Princess, he is my guest," and led her into the castle.

It was evident from the unearthly glare of her wonderful eyes that she needed a little rest, and was in fact on the edge of yet another attack of nerves.

Gene Tunney had meanwhile been carted swiftly away to a kennel in some out-lying part of the castle. Though doubtless surprised and indignant at this treatment, he could not in fairness complain of the efficient manner in which his maintenance had been provided for. In Rex Guggenheim's organization, even a panther had its appointed place.

Dan, accompanied by a footman, ran the car down through a maze of archways and courtyards, filled with hurrying servants and lounging chauffeurs, and left the Pannonia-Svitza in a worthy garage.

In a dream, he followed the supercilious footman back into the castle, and entered its vast, vaulted, tapestried hall feeling very dirty and tired. He was led up the wide staircase, between heraldic beasts carved in wood, and through a wrought iron grill with the initials R.G. intertwined over the doorway, then down a long, polished corridor, past doors curtained by heavy hangings of brocade. The shining surfaces of the floors were broken here and there by pools of mellowed colour from the stained glass medallions of the lofty windows. If he had been less exhausted, even his untrained eye might have taken admiring account of blue and green Renais-

sance tapestries hanging on the walls, inlaid and lacquer cabinets on landings, carved Italian chests in alcoves, and the flowers which glowed with pale or gaudy splendour in chalices and bowls, arum lilies and bunches of roses sweetening with summer freshness the musky smell of the old house.

The servant drew aside a curtain and showed him into a bedroom. He realised that it was a bedroom from the bed which stood in an alcove, and was hung with satin curtains embroidered with silk flowers. Otherwise the room in no wise resembled the visitors' bedrooms at Bally Cavan House with their calendered chintz covers and walnut suites, or for that matter any other bedroom that he had ever seen. There were more hangings, a dull gold and scarlet painted ceiling, a floor tiled in faded reds and yellows, and strewn with rare rugs woven in gold and brown. The servant was saying in broken English, "Your baggage—it will be collected and sent to you."

Dan looked down at his battered knapsack which he held in one hand and grinned faintly.

"Clever chap, if he finds my baggage!" he thought as the footman closed the door behind him. He removed his disreputable-looking boots, placed them on a fourteenth century *prie-dieu,* hesitated for a moment while he fingered his tobacco pouch, decided that he would "have one" later on, went to the bed and, horrible to relate, flung himself at full length on a rose satin counterpane, which like the bed curtains was delicately wrought with silk em-

broidery, a counterpane which, had the young barbarian only known it, dated from the seventeenth century. But he did not know it and even if he had known it, it is not certain that he would have cared. He stretched himself luxuriously, rolled over once and sank into a profound sleep.

When he woke up hours later, the evening sun was pouring in through the deep-set gothic windows, turning the room into the semblance of a great illuminated manuscript.

Standing by his bed was a slim, fair youth clad in a silk dressing-gown that was a symphony of blue and silver. Dan blinked at him and muttered rather rudely, "Who the devil are you?"

The visitor replied gently in a youthful affected voice, "I'm afraid I've frightened you! I suppose you are aware that while you've been taking your slumbers you have been ruining an *objet d'art?*"

Dan, half asleep yawned in his face. "How much?"

The youth pointed to the crumpled bedspread. "Seventeenth century," he commented, caustically. "A *pièce de musée,* only our astounding host thinks that all the world's a stage and so every room in this place is either a drama or a comedy. Hence the pearls before swine. Sorry to have to compare you to a pigling, but you must admit that it is rather a crime to roll like this on an exquisite piece of needlework."

Dan sat up, stared at him and said in his slow voice, "Having got all that off your chest, perhaps

you wouldn't mind telling me firstly who you are and secondly why you're giving a mannequin show in my room, and lastly where I can find the odd bathroom. As for this counterpane that you're making such a whale of a song and dance about, if it's lasted as long as you say, it's probably good for a bit longer. Anyhow," he wound up emphatically, getting off the bed, "take it from me that when one's driven a pack of raving lunatics for twenty-four hours on end, one wouldn't think twice of going to sleep on the best bed in Buckingham Palace."

The youth gave a faint smile and remarked more respectfully, "I've heard about your wonderful feat and I was told that you were next door to me, so that's why I came in to have a peep at the sleeping hero. Apropos of who I am, my name is Ivor Sneyd. You may possibly have read my biography, *Myself and Twenty Other Interesting Personalities.* It was that vulgar but profitable thing, a best seller." His voice oozed self-consciousness mingled with self-admiration. As Dan remained unimpressed, he went on in a slightly piqued voice, "I'm here to write a series of studies on Rex Guggenheim and his circle. He and the paper I'm writing for—the *Looker-On*—have arranged the affair between them as propaganda for the intelligentsia. It's going to be a new thing in interviews, showing people as they see themselves. I'm the only journalist in the castle—if you'd call me a journalist?" he ended on a note of inquiry.

Dan eyed him lazily, and meditated as to whether

it would be less trouble to hint him out of the room, or to put up with him. He decided to let him remain babbling there on that window seat. After all one need not listen to the fellow, and he might be able to give some useful information about things in general.

"Where's the bathroom?" he again inquired, in politer tones.

"What! You are tired of my brilliant conversation already? When you are staying with a millionaire producer you are allowed to have your own bathroom. There is no promiscuous bathing here, which is more than can be said for anything else! In point of fact your bathroom is, I think, behind that portière with that very delightful-looking unicorn on it."

Dan took his sponge out of his knapsack, pushed aside the curtain and exclaimed, "Gosh! this is a super bathroom! Well, so long."

Ivor Sneyd produced a note book and a silver pencil encrusted with turquoises. "Please don't hurry for me," he begged. "I rather think that I feel in the mood to write a sonnet. What about trying one on a 'Lewd Lady and a Chaste Unicorn.' Rather a lovely idea don't you think?"

Dan paused, gave him a searching look, grinned and disappeared into the bathroom.

Quarter of an hour's splashing and whistling, then he emerged cleansed almost beyond recognition. He advanced purposefully on Ivor Sneyd. "I say, can I. . . ."

Ivor Sneyd squeaked and rushing to the window with "No! no! it's frightfully obscene, you can't see it," pulled a page out of the note book, tore it up and threw the fragments out of the casement window. During Dan's ablutions, he had changed the subject of his sonnet and had written three lines on "A Commonplace Young Man and a Bedspread."

Dan watched him with good-natured scorn.

"Don't worry, I've never gone in for poetry."

"Oh! you are refreshing!" giggled Ivor Sneyd.

"Glad you like me, because I want to borrow a clean shirt off you. My spare one is worse than the one I've got on. By the way, what am I to do about changing? I've got nothing with me. Seems to me it's going to be rather a problem."

Ivor Sneyd gave a high laugh.

"My dear fellow, you need not worry about that. You will find every form of sartorial self-expression here."

Dan demanded, "What about lending me the odd shirt?" He felt at least ten years older since the epic motor drive and quite able to tackle harmless eccentrics, however glib of tongue.

Ivor Sneyd's room, next door to Dan's, was high and had a dark ceiling. Its walls, panelled with pale golden silk were like a fantastic aviary of painted birds and flowers. The furniture was of old black lacquer. In a small antechamber was a bath of pale green glass, supported by twisted bronzed dragons. A paroquet preened its feathers in a gilded cage hanging in the window. Ivor Sneyd

began apologetically, "This *chinoiserie* is not at all a suitable background for my personality. I'm too twentieth century, but I was only given the choice of this room and your room and I couldn't resist that fabulous-looking bath. I'm going to write a marvellous description of it in my account of this place."

Dan repeated gently, "What about those shirts?"

Ivor Sneyd went up to a cabinet and after a struggle with an antique lock lifted out of one of its drawers a pile of silk shirts of unusual pastel colourings.

Dan examined them and gingerly selected one. The collar was curious-looking, but the shirt itself had a narrow brown stripe and seemed to him to be at least a first cousin to the type of shirt that was favoured by the he-men of the Cavanagh family.

Ivor Sneyd laughed, "I can't say that I think your sartorial taste is very daring, but I suppose you know best what suits your style. Of course you are so full of vitality that you don't have to maintain your emotional equilibrium with these trivialities. All the same shall I lend you this delicious handkerchief? It's rather nice, isn't it?"

Dan waved it aside.

"Afraid that I haven't got enough vitality to carry that off! It's like a custard pudding and I've always loathed custard pudding."

Having selected a pair of brown shoes he was preparing to return to his room with his spoils. "Why not stay and change here? Please use my

brushes," begged Ivor Sneyd in his attenuated voice. "There is really no one here whom I can talk to, except of course my friend Stanislas de Lezcienki whom you haven't met yet. They are all so taken up with themselves. Of course self-pity is one of the deadliest sins, but life is pretty grim for anyone of my temperament. One really feels sometimes that one's parents owe one an apology for having produced one."

Dan, who from his earliest years had always had an entirely opposite point of view impressed on him, looked round with interest, then began to dress.

Ivor Sneyd interrogated him curiously. "When you said 'lunatics' just now, did you mean your famous travelling companions?"

Dan nodded casually. "You've got it."

"Oh, I say, that's rather choice! Don't you realise that you have had the honour of driving one of the most notorious beauties in Europe and one of the greatest portrait painters in the world?"

"What, that Ames chap?"

"No!" moaned Ivor Sneyd. "Oh, what a waste! If I'd had your opportunity of motoring like that with the great Swann, I would have got enough material out of it to write half-a-dozen articles! Tell me, is he really as marvellous a talker as they say? He has got the most exotic house in Paris, I believe, and people fight like tiger cats to get invited to his parties. Beauties are nowhere till he has deigned to paint them, though when he does so, he generally takes away the poor dears' hard-earned reputation

for looks. Anyhow he's getting elderly now and will only do the portraits of his favoured friends. Of course there is no doubt that he is the greatest of his kind, of this decade."

Dan was interested.

"I thought he looked rather an artistic fellow. All the same, I liked him. Funnily enough there was a fellow who owned a hat like that who came one summer to Bally Cavan and did a ripping sketch of the churchyard and the family vault. One of my aunts turned it into a calendar and gave it to my people for Christmas. Rather a depressing effort but it's the sort of thing one's relations do at that time of year."

Ivor Sneyd put one long hand to his brow, then gave a jangling laugh. "You are perfectly exquisite! I think that you are going to do me a lot of good. My nerves have been shocking since the journey out here. You make me feel quite young again."

"Well, aren't you young?" Dan grunted as he struggled with his hair parting.

"In years twenty-one. In experience and disillusionment older than that tiresome person Methuselah. However, I won't worry you with the morbid tale of my life, while you are trying to make yourself beautiful. Anyhow you have done a good deed in bringing the Princess here. Rex would not allow any business to begin till she came, and the inaction was beginning to have a bad effect on some of us. Ghastly squabbles or the reverse. Love in

Idleness in fact. Satan finds, etc. That fellow Harry Ames that you brought, is going to design the scenery. He has got a face like a butcher, and he is the sort of person who would wear a bowler hat and a trench coat in London, but he has got the taste of an angel. As for the rest of the house party, you will get to know them in time—they can be roughly divided into good, bad and indifferent. The good have had the most appalling pasts and now having reached the end of everything are wallowing in pseudo-asceticism—the bad are comparatively simple as their *idée fixe* is to be bad. What is being bad by the way? The indifferent don't interest one. When they are women, they generally have bad ankles."

Dan had not been listening very attentively. Now he said, "That's certainly a handicap for a girl. Girls with shocking legs do get married all the same. One of my brothers was rather had that way. He got engaged to a girl one year when there was a fashion for long skirts. When dresses went up again, her legs were rather a jar for him. The announcement was in the *Times* by then, and so there was nothing doing. However, her face was all right, and so was her character, and they've been very happy."

Ivor cackled sarcastically. "You *really* believe that people can be happy, married?"

"Yes, I do," replied Dan slyly. "My parents are for instance, and so is our game-keeper and his wife!"

This conclusive piece of evidence in favour of matrimony had an apparently disconcerting effect on the young author. He remained silent.

Dan, feeling that he was once more on solid conversational ground, said, "Well, what about a move on? I'm for locating the dining room as soon as possible. It must be nearly time for a feed."

With resolute step he left the lacquer room, Ivor Sneyd trailing elegantly behind him.

IX

THE CASTLE

THE banqueting hall was gay with light and sound.

The refectory tables placed in a straight line down the centre of the vast room were covered with silver and fruit and shimmering candles.

At each end of the room logs were blazing in the deep fireplaces. The glow of the flames broke up the darkness of the vaulted roof and drew metallic gleams from the drooping heraldic banners. The high windows were curtained by straight crimson hangings patterned with fleurs de lys of faded gold.

The walls were entirely hung with fourteenth century tapestry, so exquisite that the woven figures seemed part of the company in the big hall—these delicate-faced ladies with veils on their hair and flowing dresses, standing in flowery woods with their retinue of meek-eyed greyhounds holding banners, courtly lions girt with shields, monkeys, rabbits and other moonish denizens of mediæval fantasy.

Twenty-nine people, in various styles of evening dress and speaking a variety of languages, were eating and drinking at Rex Guggenheim's board that night.

Servants hurried to and fro, backwards and forwards through the big doors, chasing away the elk-hounds who took it as their immemorial right to stretch themselves at full length before the hearth fire. In the musicians' gallery a gipsy band played with fire or brooding melancholy, their rhythms interweaving with the talking and bursts of laughter from the guests below.

At the head of the table in an historic chair of gilded carving and dull red velvet sat Rex Guggenheim in tail coat—plebeianly regal. He never raised his voice, his immediate circle leaning forward to catch his flow of urbane humour and neatly tabulated philosophy.

The Princess Vanda Fiorivanti sat on his right hand. She wore a gold tissue dress with an ermine cloak slung round her shoulders, and had a Russian headdress of pearls on her flaming hair. Her theatrical trappings could not altogether submerge her air of finely-wrought breeding. There was something impressive about her wild, superb eyes, ethereal hands and the poise of her small head on its long neck. One of her lovers had once morbidly declared that her throat made him think of axes and martyred queens.

On Rex Guggenheim's left hand, Horatio Swann sat crookedly in his chair. He was engaged in an argument with his host on the question of whether or not the final word has been said in art. To judge from his remarks it would appear that he held the opinion that the sooner everyone, including himself,

stopped painting the better. He emphasised his points with a twitch of his fine nostrils, a lift of his shaggy eyebrows, and a good deal of perilous tapping on a priceless drinking glass with a lead pencil.

The Princess applauded and laughed at the rapier-like thrusts of Horatio Swann and the logical replies of Rex Guggenheim, swayed forward from her high-backed chair, twisted her rings and bracelets feverishly, her long diamond ear-rings twinkling continuously like two nervous stars.

Further down the table Harry Ames was eating and drinking with relish, and bending over a golden-haired girl whose expression seemed to proclaim her opinion of herself to an admiring world, "So young, so beautiful and yet so clever!"

Ivor Sneyd faced them in a pale blue velvet smoking-jacket which he wore with an air of self-consciousness. His clear voice could be heard discoursing pleasantly on himself. It was a subject that always seemed to him to hold great possibilities, and now under the benign influence of champagne, it appeared to him to be more absorbing than ever.

Far away at the extreme end of the hall sat Dan. He was feeling depressed. Every trace of the successful young hero of the Pannonia-Svitza episode, had left his bearing. He had not expected to shine in eccentric cosmopolitan society, but since coming down from his room he had been so utterly ignored that his mercurial spirits had sunk to zero.

The festive gathering, the lamentations of the violins, the lights, the laughter, the food, even the

drink had only added to his sense of loneliness. "Fish out of water," he thought as he helped himself generously to venison.

His right hand neighbour, Mrs. Bertrand Steele, who until this course had been engaged in a discussion with the man on her right on the subject of birth control, suddenly turned and stared at Dan. She had eyes like intellectual pebbles, greying hair cut in a close shingle and a firmly-built figure. She prided herself on not wasting time on clothes, but to-night she had relaxed from her rule of sartorial severity and was wearing a white hand-embroidered silk jumper in conjunction with a cornflower blue skirt. She stated, more than asked, with satisfaction,

"You're suffering from an inferiority complex, aren't you?"

"What!" exclaimed Dan, staring at her.

"Oh, yes. The reactions of the immature mind is a subject that happens to interest me. I saw at once that you were mentally uncomfortable."

"On the contrary, I'm enjoying myself very much. Jolly good food here."

"Food! You evidently don't ask much of life! Educated at a public school?"

"Yes, I was."

"Ah! I thought as much. You public school boys are all alike. Turned out like sausages from a machine. The intelligence level produced by our present educational system is deplorable."

"Sorry you think so."

"I can prove it to you. For instance what is your opinion of this house?"

"Eh . . . this house? I think it's ripping."

"Ripping! Ripping!" She laughed disagreeably. "And no doubt you think that games are ripping and cars ripping, and pretty, brainless girls ripping, and all this monotonous jazz music ripping? The things in life that you don't like, you summarise as 'rotten,' while you remain totally unaware of the rest of the universe. In fact you are the timid victim of a conventional upbringing. We are out to change all this."

Dan went red with rage. "Well, please don't begin on me. I'm too old to start being clever now."

"It is not a question of being clever. It is a question of saying *Yes* to life. It is a question of having a splendidly open mind on all subjects. It is a question of being a good European. It is a question of being *educated,* not stuffed with half-digested facts. It is a question of *thinking,* not of being a games' machine. It is a question of being an individual, not a type."

"In fact there are as many questions to it as a centipede has boots!"

"Yes. Like most young Englishmen you take refuge in self-protective facetiousness, when faced by a moral issue."

Dan warned himself, "Steady! you're going to insult her in a moment. One mustn't insult ladies even if they are. . . . After all she is a lady, I suppose? Anyhow one must give her the benefit of the doubt."

She went on triumphantly, "I notice that you have nothing to reply. Your lazy thinking habits have let you down. There's going to be no room in the new order of things for slack thinkers and ungirt minds like yours."

At this juncture, Dan deliberately turned his back on her, and in a strained voice asked a dark-eyed young man by his side, what "the band was playing, it sounds like a march?"

"You are quite right," answered this gentle highbrow, "it's a Hungarian march. Are you fond of music?"

"Yes," stated Dan loudly, hoping that Mrs. Steele would hear, "especially good music."

Mrs. Steele did hear and leant forward, sensing a new subject for attack.

"There is no good or bad in music, Professor Weir, or in anything else for that matter. Everyone must think out their own opinions and have their own standards. We want more scepticism in art as well as in morals. Why for instance should my boy Lenin, who is eleven, accept the view handed down to him by prejudiced adults that Beethoven is one of the greatest of musicians, when Beethoven may, in fact does, mean nothing to my boy Len? His standard of musical perfection happens to be the newly-discovered Lapland composer Vsevolod, who as you know has dispensed very successfully with time, key, rhythm, bass and treble."

"It may not mean much to you I know, but it means a lot to an Eskimo!" quoted Dan with gusto.

He had recovered his nerve at the sight of a culinary masterpiece, in the form of an aeroplane of ice-cream and chocolate, which was being carried rapidly towards his side of the table.

Professor Weir's eyes lit up with amiable fervour behind his spectacles, and leaning a little across Dan, he answered firmly, "I am afraid that I must disagree with you, Mrs. Steele, on the question of there being no recognised standards in music. Your line of argument is destructive rather than constructive, if I may say so. To put it briefly, even the plain listener" ("and the listener in this case is as plain as hell!" thought Dan) "can realise that some combinations of notes are ignoble and insignificant, while others are inspiring either from an emotional or from an intellectual point of view. I am of course reducing the argument to its simplest form. It is a most interesting point that you have raised." ("I raised it," Dan reflected proudly) "but it is difficult to discuss it as it ought to be discussed on account of all this talking round us and those delightful tziganes up there and . . . er." His voice faded away. He was much too polite to add, "and with this nice young ignoramus eating his head off between us." "As for that Lapland composer that you alluded to; I have of course heard of him but I have not actually heard any of his works yet. I understand that they are very revolutionary. I rather doubt if——"

But Mrs. Steele doubted nothing.

"Of course you haven't heard him. Nobody in England has, worse luck for them! The only at-

tempt to give his '6' over the wireless (he very rightly refuses to have anything to do with obsolete musical terms such as your symphonies and opus) which was gallantly made by Mary Gooch, was frustrated by sheer class prejudice. Len heard it when he was the guest of the U.S.S.R. with that party of young Communists who visited Leningrad last spring. He was much impressed."

So apparently were Mrs. Steele's two listeners, as after this nothing was heard from them except munching. She turned again to her right hand neighbour and with characteristic mental vitality resumed the discussion on birth control.

At the other end of the room, impelled by a dynamic look from Rex Guggenheim, the Princess had risen to her feet, and had left the banqueting hall followed by the other women guests. A poetical male was heard to say as the footmen closed the wrought bronze doors behind them. "A flock of birds of paradise."

Evidently he had not noticed Mrs. Steele, decided Dan.

With the passing of the womenkind and the advent of the port, he breathed more freely and was soon involved in a lengthy discussion across the table with an Austrian on deer-stalking. He felt that there were various aspects of life in the Tyrol that would have merited his attention if only time had not been so pressing.

When at last he and his fellow-men joined the ladies in an adjoining drawing-room, he was in a fit

frame of mind to appreciate their collective charms. They presented a decorative sight. The Princess, with the air of an orchid possessed by the soul of a tigress, stood in an imperial pose by the fireplace, one long white arm stretched above her, the fingers nervously caressing the carved head of a lion. Her head was thrown back. Her eyes were indolent under their blackened lids. They always looked half-awakened when she was in the company of her own sex. Lesser beauties had grouped themselves effectively round the fire, with much display of soulful eyes and formalised lashes, crimson mouths and well-manicured hands. Each in her own way was engaged in a silent struggle against the devastating personality and reputation of the Princess. The effort of vying with her almost legendary loveliness and the tireless expression of her fantastic ego, was bringing a look of strain to their beautifully arranged faces.

On the entrance of the men, La Fiorivanti came to life, called out imperiously, "Rex, come here!" and turned her back on the rest of the company. Against their will the flower-like ladies were obliged to scatter across the shining parquet floor, leaving the Princess and Rex Guggenheim immersed in a mysterious conversation.

Dan had just fixed his watchful green eyes on a pretty young person in pale pink, at the other end of the room, who seemed as if she might be in need of him, and was preparing to stroll towards her in a dignified manner bearing a cup of coffee, when a dry

voice from behind him struck a chill into his very marrow:

"Ah! here you are. I've been waiting for you. I've been up to my room to fetch these photographs. I'm going to continue our talk about education. Where shall we sit down? I think that corner would serve our purpose."

Dan looked round slowly and despairingly, saw no means of escape short of bolting from the room, and with dragging feet followed Mrs. Steele into a small alcove, bright with candles and gay with Persian pottery—an alcove surely more designed for amorous dalliance than for instruction.

Mrs. Steele sat down firmly on a delicate Recamier sofa that creaked under her weight, took a handkerchief out of her pocket, blew her nose in a vigorous manner, replaced the handkerchief, and laid a book of photographs half on her lap and half on Dan's knees.

He cast a jaundiced look down the long room with its painted, cross-vaulted ceiling and waxed floor. The light from the hanging candles reflected itself dully on the satin and velvet fabrics of chairs, and in Venetian mirrors, and brought to life the jewel-like colours of oriental rugs and the women's dresses.

There was a hum of lively conversation; through an open folding door came the strains of a waltz. A screen of Spanish leather half hid the agreeable scene from the occupants of the alcove, enclosing them in an elegant intimacy of shaded lights and pale, subtle colours.

What an hour, what a setting! Under happier circumstances, Dan felt that this moment might have been the fulfilment of all his most romantic longings. Suppose Fiona had been sitting beside him, her admiring eyes fixed on his face, her small hand lying unobtrusively in his! Suppose that while no one was looking. . . .

"This is a view of Weaver Hall from the drive." Mrs. Steele's voice sounded far away and he had to make an effort to echo in a blank voice, "Weaver Hall?"

"Yes, the co-educational college where my boy Len is being equipped for life. The great aim of Weaver is to get children away as early as possible from the pernicious influence of their parents. It has been going for two years now and they take boys and girls from two to eighteen. I am a member of the board. . . . Here we have one of the study-rooms. . . . I ought to explain to you that at Weaver there are none of the old-fashioned restrictions to self-expression such as rules, punishments, examinations and set hours for work. Strictly speaking there is no work."

Dan broke in approvingly, "It sounds like Paradise."

Mrs. Steele caught him up brusquely.

"You must not judge the Weaver community by your own standards. You have only to glance through these photographs to see what is being done at Weaver. Here for instance is a group of youngsters voluntarily dissecting a lobster. That is the

back of Len's head. Unfortunately he just moved out of range of the camera. He shows great promise for scientific research. No driving *him* to the 'Lab'! I'm told that it is positively refreshing to see his eagerness to get to the bottom of everything. Here are the children washing up after their dinner. There are no servants so that the communal spirit of service and fellowship should be well developed. This photograph is of great interest, showing as it does, the school holding a debate on sex matters. The little fellow in the rostrum is eight years old. Note his alert expression! At Weaver the A.B.C. of sex is one of the first things that is taught to the students. By the time that they have been there six months they know everything that there is to be known."

"That sounds pretty dull, especially for the girls!"

"What a disgusting point of view, but of course just what one would expect." She went on briskly, "Here we have the theological class. The instructor is showing on a blackboard the comparative methods of the various world religions. The children are allowed to use their own judgment as to which creed, if any, they wish to adopt. Len has already decided to be a rationalist like myself. Perhaps you can realise now after seeing these photographs, something of the immense enlightenment and will-to-know that is the driving power behind Weaver. Weaver means Will and Will means Living and Living means Power!" Her voice became lyrical.

With a quickness that was as surprising to himself as it was to Mrs. Steele, Dan retorted, "As you are what you call a rationalist, I wonder that you like to get worked up about something that hasn't been proved yet. After all, this Weaver School or what not has only been going for two years, so you can't possibly tell how these kids are going to turn out. The old schools may be rotten, but they have produced some jolly fine men, and till there have been some famous Weavertonians, or whatever they call themselves, they'd better take a back seat with knobs on! The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and if you ask my opinion I'm afraid that some of those brats will eat pretty tough—especially the boys!"

He got up. "Well, I've got to shove off and write a letter now. Thanks very much for the lantern lecture."

He had no wish to leave the room, but he was determined to leave Mrs. Steele, so he passed slowly through the chattering throng unnoticed by anyone, and went up the great staircase and down the long, shadowy corridors to his bedroom.

Without turning on the electric light, he sauntered to the window and drew aside the curtains to look at the night of radiant moonlight. The valley and the forests below were drenched in it. The towers and ramparts of the castle appeared menacing and unreal like the abode of an ogre in a fairy tale, and still more fantastic were the terraced gardens that ran down from the foot of the castle to meet the

dusky woods. A profound hush lay over the shining world. The trees, the flowers, the statues in the garden, even the distant stars glittering in the inky sky were held under the spell of the moon. As Dan looked out from his window all the accumulated excitement and annoyance of the last few hours dropped away from him. The evening he thought had been a complete frost, and he had felt more lost and out of his element than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. Mrs. Steele's attention had only added to his lonely boredom. But now he was able to "sort himself out" as he expressed it. How futile all that woman's fussing and fuming about education and life in general seemed when considered in the splendour of the moonlight! He knew also that he ought to be worrying about his future plans. The more he saw of the Princess and her companions the more he realised the danger of relying on the stability of her movements. But his natural optimism, fortified by the peace and beauty of the night, enabled him once more to ignore the difficulties that confronted him.

He roused himself, switched on the light and seated himself at an ornamental and uncomfortable writing-table. Actually he had had no intention of writing letters when he had fled from Mrs. Steele, but his solitary mood seemed to call for pen and ink. He lit a pipe, took off his coat, selected a long, gilded quill pen that rather took his fancy, and pushing aside the delicate vellum blotting pad he began to write:

Schloss Erlenburg

My dear little Fiona,

Just a line to tell you that I have arrived here somewhat unexpectedly, but quite well in body and mind.

As you see, I am not yet in the land of the macaroni for reasons which are too long to explain, but enough to say that I am on my way to the same, and have had a marvellous trip here driving a Pannonia-Svitza at high speed.

I daresay it will make you open your eyes a bit when I tell you that in the car besides myself was a Princess alias beauty—a wild beast in the form of a panther, and two celebrities.

This castle, which is too splendid to describe, is filled with beauties. However, don't be jealous! There is not one of them in the same class as you. They are a stuck-up lot of fairies, the sort that are better on a party than in private life.

Well, little Fiona, as you see, I haven't forgotten what a little darling you were in the forest and under the lilac bush. You have got my address in Sicily, so I fully expect a letter shortly to hand. Shall be here for about three days.

It is a marvellous moonlight night. I wish you were here. As the song has it,

> "There ain't no sense,
> Sitting on the fence
> All by oneself in the moonlight."

Please give my kind regards to your aunt.

Your devoted friend,

DAN CAVANAGH

He felt quite exhausted after this epistolary effort and remained for some minutes leaning back in his

chair puffing at his pipe, his long legs stretched out before him. Then with a muttered, "Here goes," he drew a picture postcard of the castle out of the letter rack and addressing it to his mother, he penned the following cryptic words—

Am enjoying life as far as is possible under the circs. Sorry you couldn't see your way to wiring the money. More when I arrive. Best luck to you both. D.C.

Re-reading it with satisfaction, he remembered suddenly Horatio Swann's admonition about the iniquity of abbreviating words, but it was too late to alter it now.

He whistled to himself the refrain of "There Ain't No Sense," and thinking pleasant thoughts of Fiona, he undressed leisurely, retired to bed and in a few minutes was asleep.

X

THE CASTLE

DAN stepped out into the morning sunshine and walking along the upper terrace looked down across a vast expanse of black-green tree-tops to the far-away mountains.

Immediately below him lay the terraced garden, with its wide, carved, stone steps flanked by great iridescent jars of Venetian glass, splashing fountains, and beds of flowers arranged in blazing and intricate patterns.

Every luscious rose, every aristocratic lily, every modish carnation, every fragrant spray of wistaria hanging down the mellow parapets seemed conscious of the fact that it was a performer in Rex Guggenheim's garden pageant and was anxious to play to perfection its allotted part.

Horatio Swann's voice suddenly grumbled from behind him.

"Well, young man, what do you think of all this floral magnificence?"

"Well, I don't know. It's very swish but it looks like something on the stage. I'd like to see our old gardener Johnny O'Riordan's face if he could see it. I should say it's all been brought straight out

of hot-houses. The whole thing will be over in a few weeks."

Horatio Swann stroked his beard. "Well, after all, the place will be shut up in a few weeks. I am afraid that you will get some rude awakenings if you go through life expecting everything to be natural. After all Nature is there for man to improve on. However, in this case you are quite right. This much-vaunted garden is odious, banal and vulgar." He paused and tapped Dan on the shoulder—

"A garden to be pleasing in the sight of God and man must be the expression of love, not of money. It must be one of two things. A new garden should be the painstaking and laborious creation of an individual, and an old garden should be the painstaking and laborious creation of a generation of individuals—in fact the treasured heritage of a family."

"Yes," agreed Dan with a burst of local pride, "that's like our garden at Bally Cavan."

Horatio Swann switched the conversation off impatiently. "However, there is really no call for me to be prosing away like this before breakfast. I doubt if I know a pansy from a rhododendron" (which was untrue, he knew practically everything about all things).

They strolled together along the flagged terrace. Dan asked tentatively, "What on earth is that Mrs. Steele doing here? She doesn't quite seem to me to fit into the picture."

"My dear boy, far from her fitting into the pic-

ture, part of the picture has got to fit into her. You have fallen into the common masculine error of imagining that because a woman is physically undesirable (though evidently the divorced Mr. Steele was not once of this opinion) she is of no further use to the world. Personally I sympathise with you. That sort of face and this sort of figure" (here he paused and drew an uncomplimentary silhouette in the air with his stick) "says nothing to me. But I am told that this Mrs. Steele, though certainly not the type of lady that one would choose to get into bed with, is an expert on choral singing. She has written more erudite books on the subject than you or I would ever have the patience or the intelligence to read. Hence her unalluring presence at Rex Guggenheim's board. This miracle play that we have all got involved in is full of music. Too full of music for my taste! They are prostituting music to cover up the insipidity of the ideas. Not that it is any business of mine. The only sort of music that conveys anything to me are fugues. But your Mrs. Steele is going to be very useful. Rex will see to that."

"Well, all I can say is that she may be brainy, but she's absolutely lacking in S.A."

"What?"

"Sex appeal," Dan explained briefly, then, "There comes that fellow Ivor Sneyd. What do you think of him?'

"I *don't* think of him! I can't afford to at my age."

The young man in question had drifted out on to the terrace. He was wearing plus fours of a pale forget-me-not hue, and a beret to match. Dan mentally classified his appearance as "subhuman."

With languid purposefulness, he made a bee-line for the great painter and said in a slightly French accent, which he himself could not perhaps have accounted for, "How early you are, *maître!* I see you think as I do, that one must either rise with that much over-rated bird the lark, or else stay in bed till four o'clock in the afternoon. One must always go to extremes if one wants to keep one's balance on the see-saw of life."

He laughed and wished that he had been able to coin an epigram worthy of the occasion. Horatio Swann replied mordantly, "If you really want to know, my watch is an hour fast." He turned his back on him.

Ivor Sneyd drifted away again, and perching himself on the edge of a fountain trailed his fingers disconsolately among the gold-fish. Dan grinned at Horatio Swann who shook his head and remarked, "Bad piece of work."

A footman of gigantic stature came out bearing a large hunting-horn in his hand and gave a blast that rang round the castle walls. Horatio Swann lost his temper and turning savagely to Dan asked, "Why the devil can't they have breakfast here without making this disgusting din?" He stalked away.

Ivor Sneyd slid off the edge of the fountain with what he hoped was a fawn-like movement and ap-

proached Dan, "Out of grace already? Though hardly your fault. You did not make the noise, but then these famous men *are* rather tricky." He pressed his hand to his beretted brow. "Apropos of noise, the cacophony of those crickets in that field over there is beginning to get on my nerves. One feels that one would like to take a gigantic comb and rake them all out of the grass."

But Dan was tired of words and longing for breakfast, and he made for the morning room, where breakfast was being served on a large table in an austere setting of waxed plaster walls relieved by two lovely primitives and a few hangings of stamped leather.

From side tables came a variety of savoury smells. Earth, sea and sky appeared to have yielded up their choicest edible treasures for the benefit of Rex Guggenheim's board. Covered earthenware and silver dishes concealed steaming delicacies; there were bowls of transatlantic cereals flanked by jugs of bucolic cream, drinks that ranged from fragrant and domesticated tea, sophisticated coffee, and innocent and frothy chocolate to mineral waters for those who wished to obliterate the remembrances of last night's beverages, and champagne for those who wished to renew it. The breakfast table itself was gay with flowers and golden honey, crisp salads, purple, scarlet and orange jams. The solid virtues of home-baked breads and scones set off the more piquant attractions of gentlemen's relish and *pâte de foie gras*. The tender, velvety colouring of hot-

house fruit, peaches, grapes and nectarines vied deliciously with the opalesque hues of Venetian glass.

Dan's eyes opened in ecstasy. He made for the side table wishing that he had been born with half a dozen stomachs!

Only a few of the house party had gathered for the early morning repast. Rex Guggenheim was cloistered with his three secretaries and his frugal breakfast of toast and hot milk, in his white, enamelled bedroom, decorated to resemble as closely as possible an admiral's cabin (he had always longed to be a sailor).

Mrs. Steele was the only woman present. The uncompromising light of morning held no terror for her. Attired in a butcher blue jumper and the same serviceable skirt that she had had on the evening before, she said good morning as she entered, and, in correct German, demanded porridge.

At a side table drinking champagne and engaged in animated conversation with Ivor Sneyd, stood a tall and lovely young man wearing white plus fours, a crêpe de chine shirt with his initials embroidered on the pocket, and blue and white shoes to correspond. Long lashes shaded his dark blue eyes, his nose was no less beautifully chiselled than his mouth, which, smiling almost continually, displayed dazzling white teeth. Sleek black hair and a smooth brown skin completed his shockingly flawless beauty. Dan mentally summed up his appearance with the words, "Hair to the collar bone, plus fours to the ankles, and a whiff of scent!"

Horatio Swann drinking coffee out of a large earthenware cup motioned imperiously to Dan to sit down beside him. He remarked under his breath, "If you want to save an elderly and distinguished gentleman from dying of nausea take this chair and don't let that atrocity with the eyelashes come near me. Horrible fellow! He says he is a Pole and he *says* that his name is Stanislas de Lezcienki (de, mark you!). Hurrh!"

"He's rather a fine figure of a man, don't you think?" asked Dan hypocritically.

"No, I do not admire him! Venus from the waist upwards."

Mrs. Steele was heard saying between mouthfuls, "Yes, the rehearsals for the choir leaders start at eleven sharp, that is to say if some of those beautiful ladies breakfasting upstairs can be persuaded to give over powdering their noses and pay a little attention to work. If only I had a few of my S.P.M.'s here, there'd be a little more music and a little less discordance."

"And considerably less beauty," chipped in Ivor Sneyd. "I've seen the S.P.M.'s at the Harmonic Hall and oh, heavens! most of them struck me as being decidedly past child-bearing, if they ever had the opportunity of doing so."

The company tittered.

"You are quite correct, Mr. Sneyd," snapped Mrs. Steele, buttering a piece of toast with energy, "except for two married women, the members of the S.P.M. are all working spinsters. And thank good-

ness for them, I say! In these work-shy days when our young men think of nothing but amusement" (here she glared first at Ivor Sneyd who met her glance with pale, brazen eyes, and then at Dan who looked down guiltily) "it is a comfort to feel that there are some members of the community who know what to work for and *love* work." Her voice rang with a clarion sound and she helped herself liberally to marmalade.

Horatio Swann's deep-set eyes lit up under his heavy eyebrows and his resonant tones boomed from the end of the table. "Work! A horrific word! We work because a curse was laid on Adam, as you can read in Genesis (though I suppose that you are far too clever to read your Bible), not because we love it, though we may love the results of it. As for women, there is only one work for them to do and that is to have children."

Mrs. Steele demanded with restrained bitterness, "But what about developing their personalities?"

"Personalities! BODIES! That is all that matters for women."

Mrs. Steele turned pale and swallowed hard.

Count Stanislas chimed in eagerly, "Oh, I quite agree. Beauty in all things!" and was rewarded by a look of contempt from the great painter, who like a jungle beast pursuing his prey had no intention of relinquishing his conversational chase of Mrs. Steele. He sipped at his black coffee thoughtfully, then shot a question at her across the table. "Are you a mother?"

The entire breakfast party stopped eating and stared inquiringly at the authoress of *The Origins, Basis and Construction of Choral Singing.* Mrs. Steele replied without hesitation, "I am. I have a boy of eleven. He is considered a very remarkable child."

"A-ah! One knows those remarkable children! I was *not* one. I could not speak till I was four, walk till I was six, or read till I was ten, and of course I have never learnt either to spell or add up properly. However, I have done no worse than most."

He shot a sardonic look at her from under his heavily-moulded lids.

"Well, to continue my line of thought. You, Mrs. Steele, are too intelligent a woman not to admit that the only moment when you were worthy of your keep from a cosmic point of view, was when you had a child at your breast. By the way, I suppose that you were not so criminal as to feed it with a bottle?"

Ivor Sneyd choked over a cup of tea and had to be patted on the back by the Count who exclaimed inconsequently: "Bravo! I am all for making everyone a mother."

Mrs. Steele compressed her lips and made no reply. She looked as if she was about to be transfixed, not into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife, but into a cruse of vinegar.

Her most vehemently sacred theories on the equality of the sexes had been attacked, and from a

pitiably flippant point of view that she knew she could have easily demolished had her opponent been anyone but the famous Horatio Swann. Irrefutable arguments came swarming bee-like into her keen mind, but she had no intention of exposing herself to the painter's mordant tongue. She entrenched herself resolutely behind a smoked haddock and answered not a word.

Horatio Swann, after casting her a malicious look began to eat cherries by the dozen with savage velocity.

If Mrs. Steele's breakfast was ruined by this exchange of opinions, it added considerable relish to Dan's repast.

"That'll keep the old girl quiet for a bit," he thought joyously as he whacked into a honey-comb.

Horatio Swann pointed with a forefinger to a bowl of sea-blue venetian glass overflowing with scarlet cherries, and Dan as he passed them to him said impulsively, under cover of the general conversation:

"Well played, sir! You got her out first ball! I never thought that I could dislike a lady as much as I dislike Mrs. S."

Horatio Swann said with gruff playfulness, "Look out, my boy! It is one of the oldest bromides in the world that hate is akin to love. But you are not the one that she wants, as a matter of fact. I happen to know that she is already the Slave of Love."

"What!"

"Oh, yes—excessive brains and a sensible appear-

ance are not incompatible in women with the softer passions, only it is harder work for them, poor things. Hum. . . . Yes, it will be uphill work for her before she can snare that fellow Ames to her bed and board. I can see that he only admires the very young, the thin, the virginal, the ethereal among womenkind; a natural reaction, I suppose, from his own insufferably over-powering physique. You are having a good tuck-in by the way. Oh, well, you are young, you need it. Suppose you are still growing."

Dan, determined to lead the conversation back to the subject of Mrs. Steele's secret amours, said slyly, "Perhaps she wants to have a platonic friendship with him?"

"Platonic friendship! Not a bit of it. It won't be *her* fault if it remains all surface work."

At that moment, Harry Ames himself strode boisterously into the room shouting, *"Guten morgen,* folks!" as he came.

He wore a shirt open at his powerful neck, with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows showing his huge hairy arms, green shorts, home-knitted golfing stockings and brogue shoes. This costume was not a tribute to his Tyrolean environment as might appear at first sight, but was his usual attire when on holiday. He considered this visit somewhat in the light of a holiday, and had every intention of enjoying himself to the full, regardless of other people's opinions or feelings.

He let himself down in the chair which Mrs. Steele had reserved for him by her side, and, with

his air of being monarch of all he surveyed, called loudly for strawberries and cream. "How jolly this is! I was up at five this morning to see the sunrise. It was a marvellous sight! Isn't this a gorgeous place with these mountains round us? And the air is so invigorating. I feel as if I were a kid again."

"Well, for heaven's sake, don't behave like one! I can't bear them, especially at meals," chittered Ivor Sneyd, whose nerves had been already badly jangled by the devastating cheeriness of Harry Ames' entrance. He gulped down the remains of his tea with shuddering haste.

"I adore children," replied Ames brusquely, hand on hip and head in the air, "they're the sunlight of life."

"And why the sunlight of life particularly?" asked Horatio Swann contrarily. "I can't see any connection myself! There is a great deal of sentimental rubbish talked about children. The question of *babies* is not one that can be discussed decently in mixed society. Women, either mothers or nurses, with that admirable devotion that characterizes the sex, dedicate themselves to these unspeakable bundles of raw meat, devoid of hair and features—it is their business, nay duty, to keep them out of sight, especially out of that of the sensitive male partner, till they begin to take on some semblance of humanity! No highly civilised person can bear with equanimity the milk and jammy atmosphere of the nursery. Fortunately very few women are really

civilised." He paused, then launched out again.

"As for children, their tragedy is that they grow up, and so their charm is only a fugitive one, unlike dogs, for instance, who remain true to type from puppyhood to old age. If children were a race apart and always retained their childhood, then they certainly would command our adoration. We should burn perpetual incense before them for their purity and unsophisticated joyousness. But why should I burn incense before the chubby little girl, who in a few years' time may be an uninteresting frump, or before the bright little boy who may, for all I know, turn into a dishonest rascal?" He scowled terribly at an apple on his plate, took up his knife and cut it in half, then went on perversely: "This business of indiscriminate child-worship is simply stage-managed by parents for their own self-glorification. Of course, there are delightful and odious children just as there are delightful and odious adults. The qualities that we appreciate in the pleasant child are merely the qualities that we shall appreciate in the pleasant adult. To prove to you the truth of my banal argument, I have only to remind you that we, every man and woman in this room, were once children ourselves. And look at us now! all going from bad to worse in some way or other, either physically or morally!"

Horatio Swann cast a baneful yet pitying look at his fellow-breakfasters, rose slowly, absent-mindedly stuffed his napkin into his pocket and stalked out of the room.

There was a disconcerted silence. The Count broke it by remarking complacently, "I was a love-ly child. All my nurses fell in love with me. My mother the Countess has told me so!"

Mrs. Steele pushed her empty plate away, brushed a crumb off her skirt, and in tones that suggested to the initiated that she was accustomed to public speaking, said, "Of course, poor old man, he is quite off the mark. On the contrary, the principal interest of children lies in the fact that they are . . ."

But she found that the egg-eating Harry Ames would soon constitute her whole audience. Ivor Sneyd and the Count had slid off arm in arm through the arched door. Dan was beating a retreat through a French window into the garden. He thought, "The only snag about these people with their heads stuffed with ideas is that they can't get together even at breakfast without having a row. Only they call it an interesting discussion. All right for the people who have got strong digestions. Don't mind it personally. A few more meals like that one will finish that fellow Sneyd up, for one. So perhaps as usual, it's all for the best!"

He stepped blithely out into the sunshine and wandering along a terrace, pipe in mouth, soon sank down gladly into a carved, marble seat in the midst of the perfumed warmth of a sunken rose-garden. He had, he thought with satisfaction, more than made up for his twenty-four hours of simple fare in the forest. If the food kept up to this standard, it would undoubtedly be a considerable wrench to

tear himself away from this delectable castle. But tear himself away he must, and without undue delay. He could not keep the Wansteads waiting about for ever. He had quite understood from Horatio Swann's remarks at the inn, that the Princess was only paying a flying visit to her producer, to talk over and sign the contract, and make arrangements for future rehearsals, and that a few days would find them on the road to Italy. But his twelve hours' sojourn at Schloss Erlenburg had somehow given rise in his mind to a vague uneasiness on this point.

Only Horatio Swann, among the members of this party, evinced any interest in him, and that of an erratic nature. Supposing that his wild-eyed employer, the Princess, chose to stay on longer than the proposed few days? In that case, there would be no alternative for him but to ask for his pay, and take the train for Sicily. It would be very awkward to interfere with the Princess' plans or lack of plans, and demand his wages from her, but it would have to be done. It was a pity, he thought, that life seemed to consist of a series of worries, large and small, so that the smooth and pleasant intervals in between were spoilt by the contemplation of the next obstacle to be overcome. However, it was not his habit to search the horizon for clouds, and he told himself that this unwonted anxiety on his part was probably due to too large a breakfast and lack of exercise.

He was wondering dubiously if there was anyone in the house party who would give him a game of

tennis, and had come to the conclusion that there was not likely to be, when he became aware of a forget-me-not coloured form approaching him. Ivor Sneyd paused by a bed of triumphantly beautiful roses, selected with care a white flower and fixed it in his button-hole with the words, "A rose—the most beautiful and yet the most hackneyed flower in creation. One almost feels ashamed to be seen taking any notice of it. And yet there is undoubtedly something about it. It is so worldly and smooth and perfect and yet so fragrant," his voice faded away and he half-closed his eyes.

Dan contemplated him with disgust, and asked him if he would care for a game of tennis. Ivor Sneyd replied that he himself had never taken it up, because he thought that people plunging about on a tennis court had the same air of heated futility as *sauté* potatoes in a frying pan, and this worried him. But he added respectfully that Count Stanislas de Lezcienki might oblige. He was, it appeared, a well-known player on the Riviera and had won several cups.

Dan concealed his astonishment at this piece of information. He had yet to learn that the most unlikely people could do the most unlikely things, and that an effeminate appearance and athletic prowess were not necessarily incompatible.

Ivor Sneyd was saying dreamily, "Stanislas is a marvellous young man! As talented as he is handsome. He has been making a great name for himself on the silent films and mark my words he'll do

even better on the talkies, especially when he has mastered his delightful Slav accent. We were at Oxford together. He's one of my greatest friends. He's very, very delightful."

Dan could only think of one word which in his opinion described the Count. That was his favourite word, septic, but he was losing his former habit of blurting out his thoughts and was beginning to take a more detached view of his fellow-men. While a short time ago some of these queer companions would have annoyed him, they were now beginning to divert him. He seemed to have travelled a long way from his relations with their virtuous lives, rigid codes and literal terms of speech. It was not that he thought less of his family atmosphere since his new experiences. On the contrary in many ways his opinion of it had increased. He was beginning, however, to realise that all one's fellow-beings could not be fitted into the same mould, even if it happened to be a good mould, and also that if one wished to be amused rather than edified there was nothing like getting away from home!

Ivor Sneyd looked at his watch and noted languidly that it was half-past eleven. He suggested that Dan should join him in attending the rehearsal of the leaders of the angel choirs who were practising under Mrs. Steele's direciton in the music room. Dan at first showed reluctance to get within firing range of Mrs. Steele, but this lounging in the sunny garden was beginning to bore him, and there was a tempting sound about the word "angels." He

asked cautiously what sex they were. When Ivor Sneyd giggled, that officially of course they were sexless, but actually they were a company of fair damsels, Dan agreed with alacrity to accompany him back to the castle.

As they walked away together, Ivor Sneyd lowered his voice, "Come down here. There's something I want to discuss with you." He led him down a narrow path, bordered with purple irises and shut in with stunted cypress trees, there he stopped, laid a damp hand on Dan's arm and said mysteriously, "Tell me, have you noticed something peculiar about the atmosphere here?"

Dan thought that if he began to give his opinion on the peculiarities of his new surroundings, he and Ivor Sneyd might remain under the cypress trees all day. So he contented himself with replying casually, "Oh, not more than one would expect from a pack of artists."

Ivor Sneyd shrilled at him, "Do try and be a little more perceptive and see below the surface of things! I do want your advice so, and you are one of the few people here who have got nothing at stake."

("Oh, haven't I?" thought Dan bitterly. "Only a perfectly good job!") He said: "What's all this whale of a fuss about, and what can I do?" Ivor Sneyd launched into a graphic account of the importance of this latest of Rex Guggenheim's dramatic ventures. It was predicted that it was to be the greatest Miracle Play ever staged, surpassing in magnificence and beauty any other of its kind.

Thousands of pounds had already been spent on advertising it. New York, Berlin and London were waiting with interest to see it in three months' time. What could be seen here at Schloss Erlenburg in the way of preparation was the mere nucleus of an intricate organisation which was going to be set in motion during the next few weeks. Only the two principals and the chief choir leaders were here at this actual moment; the remainder of the house party consisted of experts who had come here to submit their plans and suggestions to Rex Guggenheim. Other experts were working away on their own account in Berlin and Vienna. Mrs. Steele, for instance, was going to the former city, in a week's time, to consult with Professor Hoffmann, the well-known authority on fourteenth century church music. No journalist had yet been allowed on the scene of Rex Guggenheim's activities. The production was still in the rough, and Guggenheim was not the sort of man to countenance any premature pryings into an undertaking of this importance. But when the real nature of this so-called house party leaked out, an avalanche of reporters and press photographers would be sure to descend on the castle. Soon it would be impossible and even undesirable for the wily Rex to stave them off. It had been clearly understood at the Schloss Erlenburg that serious rehearsing of the principals would commence as soon as the Princess arrived and had signed the contract—(it was said that she was to get the sum of ten thousand pounds for her performance). In spite of these facts, rumour had it

that she had wired to Rex Guggenheim from Paris announcing her intention of staying at Schloss Erlenburg for only three days and of returning later from Italy for her preliminary rehearsals! With every day growing more precious as the date of production approached, the suggestion of the Princess was fantastic, impossible, childish. Yet Rex Guggenheim had apparently taken her change of plans with lamblike acquiescence, and it indeed seemed as if the whole gathering was turning into a picnic. "A glorified *fête champêtre,*" Ivor Sneyd went on impatiently. "What I want to find out, and this is where you come in, is it true that the Princess is leaving in a few days' time? I suppose you know, as you are her pseudo-chauffeur. For the life of me, I daren't ask Rex. I haven't seen him all the morning. He's shut up in his rooms boxing with that sparring partner of his. Boxing! boxing! when Rome is burning!" Ivor Sneyd sounded as if he was going to cry.

Dan became important.

"I see your point. Well, I can put you right about one thing. I don't mind telling you, as there's never been any secret about it, that the Princess and Mr. Swann are going to Rome in a few days' time. I am driving them, leaving them there and going on myself to Sicily."

"Ha!" Ivor Sneyd remained for some time in silent astonishment, his sandy lashes cast down. Dan finally said, "Come on! let's go and have a look at those angels! It's no good standing here muttering like a couple of Guy Fawkes' conspirators."

Ivor Sneyd hardly heard him, his eyes were gleaming with excitement. He murmured, "Well, during the next few days we shall see." As they climbed up to the terrace of the castle, they came across Count Stanislas de Lezcienki standing with one foot resting on the marble edge of a small fountain. He appeared to be chanting an invocation to the little mermaid who presided over the tumbling waters. Ivor Sneyd remarked that he looked so incredibly ornamental that only the fact that the mermaid's heart was made of marble like the rest of her rounded form, could explain why she had not long ago slid from her perch into his outstretched arms. He greeted the Count affectionately. "Hail, Adonis! Why are you trying to entice that insignificant female from her watery duties? I declare that I feel quite jealous."

The Count turned his lustrous dark blue eyes towards his friend and smiled his perfect smile.

"Hello, Ivie! I am just doing a leetle work on my lonely own for the 'talkies.' Seeing that the great Rex has left us to our own vices."

"You mean *dev*ices, dear boy," crooned Ivor Sneyd. "How are you getting on?"

"I do not go pleasantly, but I go as pleasantly as I can," the Count replied ambiguously, then he went on with what he hoped was childish eagerness, "See, Ivie! I have good propositions all ready from the Talkie-Talkagraph Co., U.S.A. But it is my accent that is going to be my ruin. *C'est affreux! C'est epouvantable!* What shall I do about it? Help

me, Ivie! I have wired for an English teacher of elocution to come and learn me. But perhaps Rex will not be happy to see him. He would like us to think of nothing but this miracle play. But now all is at a standstill, so why should I not butter my own bread?" He threw back his beauteous head, and cast a pleading look at his friend from under his disgracefully long lashes. Ivor Sneyd overwhelmed him with delicate sympathy.

"Of course, my dear. Don't worry about Rex. He'll never notice your elocutionist. One person more or less in this Tower of Babel won't matter. I'll help you. Rely on me——" He babbled on soothingly, till Dan with a grimace decided to wander on and leave them to their emotional *tête à tête,* or what he mentally termed "their girlish confidences."

As he approached the castle, he saw against the grey walls an elegant female form clad in a billowy frock of lemon-coloured organdie, wandering pensively towards a side door. With her sunny hair hanging in curls almost to the fichu that framed her smooth white arms and shoulders, her tall slender figure, moulded by her dress into a suggestion of old-fashioned curves, she gave the appearance of having floated out of the past.

He quickened his footsteps. He felt flustered at the prospect of addressing such a stately young beauty, but was determined to make the acquaintance of this lovely fellow-guest, whom he had admired the evening before at dinner while he had watched

her talking to Harry Ames, and who he had been told was April, an artist's model and mannequin, recently discovered by Rex Guggenheim and engaged by him to take the part of the chief angel in one of the choirs of his three heavenly hierarchies.

Dan coughed nervously as he caught up with her, and said in a voice which he hoped sounded nonchalant:

"You've been taking a walk?"

She turned her delicately-chiselled face up to him with a look of dreamy surprise. Her eyes were large and widely set apart and of a beautiful and unusual colour. One of her innumerable admirers had, with some reason, compared them to the translucent green of the evening sky after a summer sunset. Dan was fascinated by their glance. He would willingly have removed his elderly blazer and have laid it down Walter Raleigh fashion before her slim feet. She inspected him with an air of detachment, and said in her flat, refined tones:

"No, I never go for walks. I'm going now to practise my singing. You know I'm the leader of the Seraphs."

"Of course I saw at once that you were some sort of an angel!"

He was rewarded by a phantom smile, and congratulated himself conceitedly, "Not too bad for the first over."

He donned his most gallant manner and asked, "Can I come into heaven with you and listen to you singing?"

"Yes, if you like. I'm late. Mrs. Steele will be getting very cross. She hates us being late, but I always am."

Dan laughed whole-heartedly. This charming creature was rapidly becoming, in his eyes, like the princess of the fairy tale, who could not speak without pearls and flowers dropping from her lips. He held open the door for her, strode down the stone-flagged passage and pulled back the gold and cream leather curtain for her to pass into the centre hall.

Even these trivial services filled him with satisfaction. She glided towards a table bearing a tray of cocktails and to Dan's surprise swallowed a couple with delicate rapidity. He thought sympathetically, "Poor girl! I expect that this singing is an awful sweat. She is much too beautiful to work. Gosh! What a figure!" as she turned towards him with a fluid grace that was a revelation to him, accustomed as he was to the matter-of-fact movements of his country relations and friends.

She murmured that she was now going to the music room, and moved off down a long passage followed by her new admirer.

The music room was a big, soaring apartment with windows that gave upon a precipitous view of the countryside beneath. To-day, each gothic window framed a vista of clear blue sky with vast clouds sailing down like white galleons on to the peaks of the hazy, grape-coloured mountains. Slopes of inky-green pines rushed headlong from the very walls of

the castle towards the placid valley, which lay like a green chess-board far below.

The walls of the room were lined with a colour of a night-blue shade, the painted ceiling depicted Orpheus with his lute and a chorus of muses sitting about on rosy clouds. One end of the room was presided over by an organ. At the other end, Mrs. Steele was thrashing a grand piano magnificently. Her face showed ill-suppressed contempt. Rex Guggenheim, with his unfailing showmanship had, as a concession to "the lewd fellows of the baser sort," decreed that each of the leaders of the nine choirs of angels should be young beauties of international repute. Several of the nine girls that his agents had selected, and who had been given orders to repair to Schloss Erlenburg during the next fortnight for the personal inspection of the producer, had been the winners of some well-advertised beauty competitions. The galaxies of professional singers, of whom the main body of the heavenly choirs were to be composed, were also the youngest and best-looking that could be commandeered from the stages of Europe. But while the ears of the audience were being entranced by their perfected warblings, the eyes of the audience, if not already completely beglamoured by the sensational lighting, scenic and decorative effects of the crowded stage, were intended to dwell principally on the nine lovely choir leaders who were to stand in front in prayerful attitudes, their slender, feathered wings of gold, crimson, violet and azure outspread, their flower-

like faces set off by radiant haloes. There was only one fly in the angelic ointment. Each leader had to start off her choir by the chanted words:

"Sing, Cherubims! Cherubims, rejoice! The heavenly roses of St. Dorothea snare the pagan soul. Sing! Cherubims, rejoice!" or "Sing, Dominions or Virtues or Powers," as the case might be. A beautiful half dozen of the chosen young women had already arrived, and only one of them had any idea of singing, as Mrs. Steele, the choral commander-in-chief had soon discovered. It was now her duty, in her own words, "to lick these pretty ladies of Rex's into some sort of vocal shape" so that they would be able to declaim their few lines without ruining by their amateurish preludes, the magnificent hymn of praise that she and Professor Weir were hard at work arranging for the final act.

Never in her crowded life had she met with a more distasteful task than the one that she was now engaged on, offending as it did both her musical and personal susceptibilities."

That she should have to waste her valuable time in trying to knock some sense and "musical decency" into the conceited heads of a bunch of undisciplined girls who, trading solely on their physical attractions, had wormed their way into this miracle play, seemed to her to be a positive prostitution of her intellect. But she had taken on the post of choral director and she was not one to falter when there was a job of work to be done, especially when there was such a remunerative salary attached.

As April entered slowly, followed by Dan, Mrs. Steele struck a chord, held it with the loud pedal and looked expectantly at a tall, full-bosomed, auburn-haired girl, with the expression of a benign amazon, who stood smiling by the piano, waiting for her cue. She opened her mouth and in a deep contralto voice and with a strong German accent intoned:

"Sing, Archangels! Archangels, rejoice!"

She got no further. Mrs. Steele held up an abrupt forefinger. "That's enough, Fraulein Lausen. You're the only one that has got any sort of a voice, or idea of time, but as I told you a few days ago, your accent is impossible. You don't seem to have made any effort to improve it."

The girl's fine grey eyes became grave as she protested pompously, "But permit me to say that I have improved. I was two hours yesterday with Miss Bunn, the elocutionist."

Mrs. Steele ignored her, scribbled something on a chit of paper, handed it to her with a gesture of dismissal.

"I have asked Miss Bunn to give you special lessons. You must try and overcome that accent of yours. It is very noticeable at the moment."

As the Teutonic beauty walked out of the room, Miss France, who was a curly-headed blonde *cendré* with vivacious dark eyes, was heard to remark in scornful tones:

"*Ma foi!* Yes! She must get rid of her accent,

if she is to be leader of the Archangels. There are no Boches in Heaven!"

The other girls giggled and then turned to look at April and Dan. Mrs. Steele examined the newcomer. "Well, late again, Miss—— I don't know your name."

"April," came the prim reply, as the speaker, looking indeed the essence of spring, sank on to a divan.

"April what?" demanded Mrs. Steele snubbingly.

"Just April."

"What a ridiculous name!" commented Mrs. Steele derisively. Dan could have killed her. He looked round admiringly at the four other lovely creatures who graced the music room, and then his eyes returned devotedly to the golden April.

"Well, whatever you are called," continued Mrs. Steele, "let's hear your lines."

She played a few bars, then paused. April, without rising, opened her delicious mouth and emitted some thin piping sounds. "Sing, Seraphims! Seraphims, rejoice!" she minced in the same terms that she might have employed for the extolling of a model gown in a fashionable dress shop.

Mrs. Steele threw up her hands with a deep sigh, banged down the lid of the piano and exclaimed, "Hopeless! Utterly hopeless! I can't really waste any more of my valuable time on any of you. Do three hours' deep breathing exercises every day, and come to me again in two days' time. And please have the courtesy to sing standing up next time."

This to April, then to the three other girls, "I have already given you your instructions. See that you carry them out, otherwise I shall again advise Mr. Guggenheim to dispense with your services, and this time I flatter myself that he will listen to me."

There was an uproar. April shrank back on the divan, pressing a tiny handkerchief to her mouth and murmured, "Oh! I can't stand these scenes."

Dan, boiling with indignation and pity, bent over her and said loudly, "This is the limit!"

The Parisian burst into excited French, to the effect that if there was going to be any breaking of contracts, her agent would have something to say on the subject. A slim girl with sombre eyes and chiselled features who had recently been acclaimed as Magyar Queen of Beauty at a Budapest contest, swept up to the piano, and without speaking, made murderous gestures at Mrs. Steele, who stared stonily back at her through her pince-nez. But it was perky Miss U.S.A. who took the situation in hand, drawling out that it was no use Mrs. Steele trying to high-hat *her,* and that she guessed that her contract to lead these darned Virtues was good and was going to *hold* good.

Mrs. Steele remained undaunted, facing the infuriated beauties with the splendid self-assurance of a thoroughly plain woman. She wore her unmitigated unattractiveness like an armour. It protected her against a sense of inferiority in a way that no pretensions to looks or charms could have done. She had never attempted or wished to be attractive,

she never unstintingly admitted attractiveness in other women (when her opinion on this question was asked she always had a ready criticism. "Too thin—too short—too fat—too tall—no expression —all eyes—insignificant—lumpy—not my idea of looks.") Consequently comeliness in other women impressed her not one whit.

She rose decisively, gathering up her music, "That's enough, please! You are a pack of stupid, conceited young women. Just because your inane faces have brought you a little vulgar advertisement, you had better not imagine that I am going to stand any nonsense from you. Let me pass, please!"

She stopped in front of April and said, "Another time, be good enough to leave your young man outside. We haven't time in here for love-making."

Dan politely opened the door for her and said with mock solemnity, "There is always time for love-making if the right people get together." To his astonishment, she blushed, gave him one last glare and hurried out. He quickly turned to April and saw that she had remained serenely self-absorbed.

The beauties were grouped together and their polyglot comments on Mrs. Steele were unprintable.

April glanced up at Dan and said softly, "You were splendid, sticking up for us. Do be a dear, and fetch me a cocktail."

The look, the tone, the smile, gave him a feeling of intoxication.

He sped off to do her bidding. As he passed along the corridor he came across Mrs. Steele and

Harry Ames seated together in the embrasure of a window. Harry Ames was listening with an air of robust boredom to his companion's angry but controlled complaints. She was evidently expressing her opinion of the intractable damsels in her most logical manner. Yet in her gimlet eyes could be discerned the glint of the female in hot pursuit of the elusive male.

XI

THE CASTLE

FIVE o'clock tea at Schloss Erlenburg took a variety of forms. There was a special gathering at the American bar of the indefatigable imbibers of short drinks. There were iced beverages for the sporting contingent on the tennis courts, in the bathing pool and in the gymnasium. There were trayloads of substantial, or hygienic dainties for the handful of experts who were cloistered in their apartments at work on designs, manuscripts and scores. There were *tête à tête* picnics in the shady parts of the garden, with huge elk hounds in attendance humbly craving for sugar and sweet biscuits.

This afternoon a tea table was laid as usual in the library, a room panelled in walnut and lined with mellow antique books. There Princess Vanda Fiorivanti held court, surrounded by a small group of admiring men.

She had recovered from the fatigues of her journey from Paris, and was looking her most beautiful. The fire of her glance had smouldered down to a mysterious lustre, her subtle make-up mocked at Nature. She looked young in a manner which appeared to better and outdo conventional ideas

of youthfulness. For her admirers, she had the macabre fascination of a disordered mind imprisoned in a body which was refined down to sheer perfection of line.

She was wearing a white dress which clung to her tall figure and floated in points round her ankles. To-day her flaming hair brushed in curls off her forehead was the only vehement thing about her, forming a diabolical aureole to her face.

Horatio Swann, seated near her, was murmuring compliments to her in a melodious voice. She listened smilingly to him, twirling her long pearls and occasionally throwing a playful word to the other men who were grouped respectfully round the two celebrities. Ivor Sneyd in spotless flannels and a scarlet blazer was seated on a cushion as near as possible to their feet. His fingers were itching to get at a fountain pen and a note book that lay in an inner pocket against his heart. Fortunately, his excellent memory was enabling him to store up for future incorporation in his half-finished book, *X-Raying the Great,* most of Horatio Swann's witticisms, and his own impressions of these two brilliant personalities. But it was a strain, and his laughter ran high and false as he struggled to win a place on the conversational raft.

Harry Ames, fresh from an invigorating swim in the bathing pool, was eating a large tea and exchanging cheerful and disjointed conversation with young Professor Weir, whose exceptional cleverness was concealed behind a pleasingly modest manner

which won for him the friendship of his widely divergent fellow-guests. Dan, who had been found, by Horatio Swann, wandering about looking for April, and had been told to follow him into the library, was seated at a table devouring large quantities of strawberries and cream, which he only abandoned when he occasionally leapt to his feet and took a plate of cakes to the Princess or to Horatio Swann. The former was heard to say approvingly, *"Il est gentil, ce garçon,"* so, unknown to him, causing his value to go up in the eyes of the assembled company.

A languid inquiry from the Princess as to Rex Guggenheim's whereabouts, drew the conversation into one channel. It appeared that no one had set eyes on him that day. The rumour was that he was hard at work in his private apartments and had given orders that he did not wish to be disturbed. The Princess mentioned that she had received some wonderful flowers from her host, and several inquiries as to her health and comfort. Horatio Swann had also received homages and inquiries through the medium of Rex's private doctor. "You'd have thought by the fellow's tone that I was a lady about to be brought to bed at any moment," grumbled the painter. "Ridiculous custom, this matutinal solicitude of hosts towards their guests. The whole thing is humbug! The hosts don't really care in the least, provided that their guests haven't actually died on their hands during the night, and the guests are simply drawn into a lie. People very seldom

feel really well on visits, for various subtle reasons which it is impossible for me to go into now."

Ivor Sneyd, looking like a sinister white rabbit, coaxed the conversation back to the subject of what he termed "Rex Guggenheim's temporary disappearance into purdah." He said nervously, "We understood that the Princess' blessed advent would mean the commencement of fierce work for everyone."

The Princess swept his words to one side, remarking indifferently that she was only there to sign the contract before leaving again for Rome. She might not be back at Schloss Erlenburg for six weeks or even more. There was an embarrassed silence. Professor Weir's intelligent eyes grew round behind his tortoiseshell spectacles. Harry Ames blurted out, "Why, Princess, you'll never be able to learn that enormous part properly in a few weeks! I understand that the rehearsals begin in Berlin a fortnight from to-day."

"Yes, Princess," chimed in Ivor Sneyd in conciliating tones, "my friend, Stanislas de Lezcienki is *terribly* anxious to discuss his part with you, and to get your view-point before the regular rehearsals begin. He had hoped so much to take the opportunity of your presence here to go over some of your scenes together, especially that rather dangerously mystical love scene before your martyrdom, but naturally your visit to Italy must come before everything. . . ." His voice trailed away unconvincingly.

The Princess gave a tigerish glance at the assembled company which produced an instantaneous ef-

fect. Everyone tried to look unconcerned, and even Dan, who had taken no part in the conversation, stared down uneasily at his creamy plate. Ivor Sneyd afterwards said to the Count Stanislas, when giving a detailed account of the incident, that it was like having a wet snake slipped down one's back.

Horatio Swann shot a piercing look round from under his thick eyebrows, and turning on the luckless Sneyd, asked him savagely if he intended to cross-examine the Princess any further. Ivor Sneyd murmured a deprecating "Oh, *maître*—you misunderstood me!" and collapsed miserably on his cushion, realising that his insatiable literary curiosity had nearly swept him into stormy waters.

The Princess suddenly rose and moved dramatically to the end of the room, turned and looked at her startled companions, then said graciously, "I will show you one of my Santa Dorothea attitudes. I do not know the story yet, so I cannot say which act it will be in."

Swiftly she tore a scarf from her shoulders, twisted it with a consummate skill so that it framed her face in folds of sculptural purity, crossed her pale hands lightly on her breast and throwing her head back gazed heavenwards. From her motionless figure emanated an impression of peace and spiritual remoteness. Her large eyes were filled with ecstasy, her mouth was set in lines of untroubled virginity. It almost seemed as though greatly sinning, she had lost the sense of good and

evil, and was therefore able to sum up all the beauty of holiness in her passion-racked person, without the consciousness of incongruity. She relaxed her pose with a sigh of genuine sadness and came slowly back towards her spellbound audience. There was not one of them who had not felt moved by the loveliness of her interpretation. They were admiring, they were grateful. Horatio Swann took her hand and said, "Dear Vanda, I ought to kiss the hem of your gown."

Harry Ames pronounced weightily, "Gorgeous, gorgeous!" "A revelation!" whispered Professor Weir. Ivor Sneyd's eyes were watery. Dan felt as though he had been in a church. As the Princess seated herself again, smiling sweetly at the adulation that she had inspired, Mrs. Steele poked her head round the door inquiring whether Professor Weir was present. She caught sight of Harry Ames and with a nod at the Princess advanced towards the tea table, remarking that she had come to borrow a music manuscript from the Professor, and adding spryly that she would be glad of a cup of tea. It appeared that she had spent a busy afternoon and got through a considerable amount of work. This announcement was received with silent hostility, those present having done no work, and consequently having no wish to hear of other people's labours. The Princess went on talking in Italian to Horatio Swann and the conversation flowed on once more, till a loud remark of Mrs. Steele's to Harry Ames caught everyone's attention.

"Yes, that's the programme for to-night. Everyone's to appear in fancy dress and dance afterwards. A nonsensical idea, but Mr. Guggenheim apparently thinks that we want amusing. In my opinion what is wanted here is a little hard work. It's very demoralising all this sitting about with nothing to do, especially for the younger lot."

"Oh, please don't worry about them," simpered Ivor Sneyd. "The garden is positively thick with petting parties. And as night falls the activity in that direction becomes simply frenzied." There was laughter and he felt that he had retrieved some measure of his lost prestige as a wit.

Mrs. Steele went on truculently, "Well, anyhow, it's a very silly idea. Yes, Harry, I daresay I can lend you a sash of some sort."

Horatio Swann picked up this remark and asked cantankerously, "What's that about a sash? Didn't know ladies wore sashes now-a-days. You'll want a pretty long sash to go round that waist of yours, Ames! I hope you're not one of those horrible fellows who dress themselves up as children on these occasions?"

The Princess turned to him and cooed, "You must not mind, Horatio, if you see me again in that gown that I wore the other night at Georgie de Combloux's party? I have a passion for it at this moment."

"What will you go as, *maître,* if one may ask?" ventured Ivor Sneyd.

"What am I going as? Do you really imagine,

young man, that I am going to make an idiot of myself dressing up at my venerable age? Oh, no! I am just going to come in my ordinary togs. I am told that I was quite a pretty fellow when I was young, but I am not worth looking at now, though I daresay that I shall make quite a handsome corpse. I'm at my best now at night. Cupid in the dark in fact!" He laughed sardonically.

"Oh, but *maître!* Your marvellous profile! You've got *bone;* surely that is what counts in the end?" protested Ivor Sneyd.

"Yes, I shall soon be nothing but bone! We shall all end up bones for that matter. I daresay my skeleton will pass in the crowd."

"My friend! Stop—stop! You are talking like an undertaker. *Cela m'énerve!*"

"Ah, I daresay it does, Vanda. People cannot stand the slightest reference to our inevitable and common dissolution!"

Ivor Sneyd tried to brighten up things by saying, "These impromptu fancy dress dances lead to a formidable amount of worry and hard thinking! I've two ideas for myself, but I don't know which one to follow——"

"Well, I wish you'd give me the one you don't want," remarked Dan, whose face had darkened at the first mention of fancy dress.

Horatio Swann turned suddenly and looked at him, "You? I'll tell you what to wear. Rex has cupboards full of theatrical furbelows upstairs. Get a brown wig, a blue coat, a stock and all the rest of

it, and with luck you'll look like a family portrait—Late eighteenth century—that's what you are."

Mrs. Steele finished her cup of tea and said deliberately, "May I ask, Mr. Swann, what you intend to convey by saying that Mr. Cavanagh is 'late eighteenth century'? Am I to understand that you hold the illogical theory that certain types of faces can be considered to belong to certain centuries more than others?"

He considered her question for a long time, then answered quietly, "Yes, I believe that is what I did mean, Mrs. Steele."

"But that surprises me very much, Mr. Swann! It's surely perfectly obvious even to a loose thinker, that the same physical types are reproduced through the centuries—allowing, of course, for imperceptible modifications and improvements brought about by hygiene and different modes of life. Nor am I alluding to the prehistoric times. Therefore, to say that a certain person has a mediæval or an eighteenth century face seems to me sheer nonsense," she ended up enthusiastically.

"I am sorry you think me such a doddering old fool. Of course, I am one, no doubt. As according to the Mrs. Grundies I have been a loose liver in my time, so it's more than probable that I am a loose thinker as well! That was your definition, wasn't it?" He fixed her with a baleful glance before continuing in a thunderous voice, "What you do not seem to understand is that I am not a thinker, I am a painter. I don't think, I SEE! Has it ever oc-

curred to you, that ninety per cent of God's ungrateful and miserable children go through life without looking at anything? The average person cannot describe to you the real shape of the commonest flower, the real shade of their beloved's eyes, the most obvious differences between nose and nose. But these are bromides! As for this question of yours as to why some cast of countenances are considered typical of certain periods of history, the answer is one that any intelligent child would be able to give you! Your precocious Len, or whatever his name is, would no doubt be able to write a much better essay on it than I could! I must put it to you simply, because, if you don't mind me saying so, you are a very clever woman but unfortunately so conceited that you cannot take in any point of view but your own. Briefly, then, it is this, the good painter is at once the interpreter and the instructor of his era. He records on canvas the soul of his time, adding to it the benediction of his genius. Those who have eyes to see let them see! Many cannot see. Theirs is the loss! The portrait painter tends to choose as the subjects of his portraits, the type of face that to him and his contemporaries seems to sum up the spiritual and physical ideals of that particular time. There may be several interpretations of one period, hence different schools of painting. When we meet these particular casts of countenance again in our own time we say, if we take any interest in the decorative side of life, 'She's a Primitive, she's a Rubens, he's a Velazquez.' And of course we also say, 'that

is a very modern face,' meaning roughly by this, that it is the latest physical expression of our civilisation. I can with all modesty predict that in a hundred years' time people will point out a human face with the words—'That's a Swann.' "

He turned to the Princess and said agreeably, "Some lovely replica of you, my dear Vanda. But I am afraid that her appearance will no longer be the modish one!"

She did not look over-pleased at this idea.

Horatio Swann's calm faith in his own genius and his art, boomed forth in his organ-like tones, had been undeniably impressive. Ivor Sneyd got up quietly, stole behind a screen and jotted down a few hurried notes beginning, "I can with all modesty predict." He decided that he would be able to reconstruct the rest of the monologue at leisure. He scribbled the reminder "Compare this self-credo with Shakes: declaration of belief in Sonnet 18."

Mrs. Steele looked unconvinced, but though to her argument was the breath of her square nostrils, she did not seem inclined to inhale any more of this one. She said ungraciously, "Well, I must be off now. I've got some work to finish. Thank you, Mr. Swann, for our stimulating discussion. Professor Weir, perhaps you wouldn't mind getting that script for me now," got up and marched out, followed meekly by her colleague.

As the door shut behind her, Dan roared with laughter, "Well, I'd like to know what period her

face belongs to! The steel age, I suppose!" Everyone joined in his rude merriment.

Horatio Swann, abruptly dropping his pontifical manner, laughed darkly. "She's the Eternal Governess, my boy, that's what she is! She's never happy unless she is correcting somebody, or improving something. If the world was full of Mrs. Steeles, the millennium would arrive to-morrow, but none of us ordinary idiots would have survived to see it! That's why we instinctively fly in self-preservation from these intellectual tanks. And, though that woman's cries about her own sense of logic rise up to heaven by day and by night, one notices that she must always be in the right, even when she is patently in the wrong."

The Princess said contemptuously, "She is an ill-natured bore! The minor graces mean nothing to her, and her brains mean nothing to me! She has the effect on poor me of a cup of bitter black coffee taken on an empty stomach."

XII

THE CASTLE

RARELY does the innate egotism of human nature emerge so strikingly than during the preparations for a fancy dress dance. Vanity and fear of sartorial failure mingling together give rise to feelings of ruthlessness in even the meekest bosoms. Everyone wishes to look their best and to make an impression of some kind, many are unprepared and uninspired, while those who are properly equipped are inclined to be objectionable in their gloating complacency.

The company at Schloss Erlenburg were no exception to this rule. Since six o'clock, the apartments upstairs had been transformed into bee-hives of hidden activities. There was banging of doors, borrowing, consultations and entreaties for assistance. Tyrolean maids hurried to and fro with armfuls of garments; the private hairdresser was making unsuccessful efforts to comply with the demands of the clamorous beauties.

Ivor Sneyd's Chinese bedroom was the meeting place for the west wing of the castle. Its lacquer furniture was strewn with garments, its walls resounded with agitated male voices. An apple-faced

maid was going from one to the other of the distracted young men, tying bows, sewing on buttons, turning up hems. Each of the four potential revellers was in a state of excited irritation. Ivor Sneyd had had the idea of appearing as a comic version of "The Modern Girl." He had borrowed a crimson evening dress, a string of false pearls, several sparkling bracelets, a pair of ear-rings which he was trying to fasten on with silk, a pair of silk stockings, and a pair of satin shoes, and he was now engaged in making up his face, blackening his eyebrows, rouging his cheeks and transforming his mouth into the semblance of a crimson gash, repeating over and over again in a febrile voice as he did so, that it was a dreadful pity that he had not been able to find a suitable wig, because it meant that his hair would have to be arranged in an Eton crop, which he admitted was so shockingly demodé.

But nobody cared, replied or listened. Not even his friend, Count Stanislas, who was standing in front of a long glass in admiring contemplation of his very fine appearance as an Arabian prince. His robes of green and gold tissue were to his satisfaction, but he was having difficulty with his turban which he was struggling to twist up becomingly round his dark head, and kept on pleading plaintively for someone to come and hold one end of the roll of stuff for him.

The Professor looked dejected in a half-sewn-together harlequin costume. The maid, her mouth full of pins, was enlarging a three-cornered hat, so

that it would fit on to his scholarly forehead without giving him a headache.

Dan was trying to entice her away from him. He had taken Horatio Swann's advice, and with the help of Ivor Sneyd, had collected the necessary articles of attire for an eighteenth century costume. Now wearing a wine-coloured coat, a fine linen stock, Wellington boots and a curly brown wig, he made a handsome young squire. For the first time in his existence, he stared into a looking-glass with the hope of seeing a flattering reflection and one that would give pleasure to someone else. He caught a glance in the mirror of the radiant Count Stanislas and asked himself nervously whether there was any hope of April being favourably impressed by his own appearance.

The door suddenly burst open admitting Harry Ames who, dressed as a Swiss mountain lad, sported on his big head a tiny straw hat embroidered with wool flowers. He blew a blast on a miniature horn and then emitted a blood-curdling yodel. Tempers were running high and nerves were taut after an hour of prinking and preening. Ivor Sneyd screamed, "For heaven's sake go away—we can't stand any more people in this ruddy room. It's pretty foul the way everyone has forced themselves in without being asked. I can't even get at my looking-glass to see if my make-up is all right." He gave a spiteful glance at Dan, who answered back shortly, "I'm damned if I want to stay in your rotten room. As it happens you did ask me to come and

dress-up here, but I'm hanged if I'm going to stay here now I'm ready."

He threw a complacent look at himself in the glass and marched out followed by the half-dressed but dignified professor, who in his turn was followed by the maid.

Harry Ames slammed the door on the two friends within and remarked with hearty egotism, "Well, I'm going to have a jolly evening, whatever anyone else means to do. I'm going up to fetch that exquisite virgin, April. She's sitting next to me at dinner." He blew another exultant hoot on his horn and rushed yodelling up a flight of stairs, nearly colliding with an Eggs-and-Bacon who, swathed in tissue paper and yellow oilcloth, was cautiously descending.

Dan remained immersed in gloomy meditation. Fears of rivalry were now added to his other agitations. Should he lurk here till that great brute Ames returned again with his lovely prize, or would it be better to wait till they met down below and then make a bid for her favour? He decided on the latter course, and made his way slowly downstairs, looking pompous but distinguished with his head held high above a beautiful cravat which he realised he had tied too tight. There was of course nothing to be done now except to forget about it, and perhaps loosen it at midnight.

Three hours later when the party was in full swing, Dan was still looking distinguished but was no longer on his dignity. With his face flushed,

and his eyes bright with wine and love, he was circling joyously round the crowded room, his arm tightly pressed against April's slender form, his lips whispering foolish and ardent blandishments into her receptive ear. She was dressed as a Snow Queen, her face delicate against a headdress of cascading sparkles, her frock a shimmer of glistening white. To complete the effect, her expression had the lovely blankness of driven snow. To Dan she seemed perfection. He realised how lucky he was to have secured from her the promise of so many dances. From the moment that she had caught sight of him across the dining-room table, and had smiled her slight smile and nodded her head in token of approval, he had scarcely tasted the rich fare before him or heard his pretty neighbour's chatter. All his attention had been surreptitiously fixed on the opposite side of the table, where across a small forest of flowers, he could see Harry Ames making boisterous advances to her. His pangs of jealousy had been acute. Miserably he had brooded over the undeniable facts of Harry Ames' superior age, experience and position, and had longed for the dinner to come to an end, so that he could know the worst. Would she give him a dance or was she perhaps already entirely booked up? When he had at last been able to rush up to her in the ballroom, she had received him with unmistakable graciousness and had accorded him six dances—to the infatuated Dan, six vignettes of paradise. Harry Ames had taken his set-back with a pretence of in-

difference which did not conceal his annoyance. During the few dances that April accorded him, he held her as far off as modern terpsichorean methods permitted, staring aggressively over her head. Whenever Dan and April passed together, Ames talked loudly to his partner, and displayed an unnatural jocularity, but Dan was too immersed in his own happiness to notice anyone except the fair cause of it. April's selection of him as her principal dancing partner for the evening had had the effect of drawing upon him the favourable notice of several of the other beauties, but he had danced with them absent-mindedly, feeling that he only lived for the next dance with his Snow Queen.

Other revellers were also "warming both hands at the fire of life." Mrs. Steele was undoubtedly enjoying herself. Taking advantage of her life-long friendship with Harry Ames, she had inscribed her initials in several places on his programme. She noticed with pleasure that he was not paying that attention to April which had so annoyed her during the last few days. "They soon get tired of that brainless type," she thought with satisfaction as she chugged round the room in the arms of Professor Weir. She expected to get first prize as a reward for the originality of her fancy dress, which she had thought out and made without assistance in an hour. She represented the New World and every part of her broadly-built person had been pressed into the service of her theories. Horatio Swann, watching

the dance from a recess, commented on her costume with the words:

"What's that ridiculous red map on her chest? Oh—Universal State is it? That'll be a long time coming! Why, we've got to get used to each other's table-manners first! She's prognosticating a horrible world! However, she'll fit into it very nicely. Hideous—hideous—all is going to be hideous. I shall be gone, thank goodness—"

He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and borrowing a lip-stick from his woman companion began to draw rapid silhouettes of some of the dancers. He did several in succession of the Princess. (One of them was left about and picked up next day by Count Stanislas, who secretly sold it for a large sum to Sir Samuel Letermann, a millionaire collector of artistic vagaries.)

La Fiorivanti's peacock dress emphasised the stateliness of her appearance. Her headdress of jewels and peacock plumes gave her an air of fantastic height. A scanty tunic of feathers fitted her sinuous figure tightly. Watching her spectacular movements, Horatio Swann murmured, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." As she passed through the dancing throng, admiring and curious glances followed her, whispered comments were exchanged, her slightest gestures and expressions were under observation, not only her beauty but her lurid reputation inspiring lively interest. When she seated herself on a princely-looking chair placed in front of a bank of

arum lilies, a group of flattering men collected round her. Foremost amongst them was Rex Guggenheim. A paper cap on his bullet-shaped head indicated that he was in festive mood in spite of his ordinary evening clothes. He was in high spirits and was paying homage to the Princess. His indiarubber-like face was wreathed in ingenuous smiles, and when he was not conversing with his future star, he beamed on the rest of his guests. Ivor Sneyd, perched on a window seat leaned forward suddenly and murmured into Count Stanislas' ear:

"If I were the Princess, I'd get Rex to sign that elusive contract to-night."

"No, *mon ami,* it would be useless for her to try. His good-nature is put on like his cap and can be taken off as easily when it suits him!"

"She certainly looks rather transcendent to-night."

The Count pouted and shrugged his shoulders.

"As you wish. For me I find *la femme fatale* type a little tiring. It is all so obvious."

"Too true," agreed Ivor Sneyd languidly, "but I do see why obvious people might be fascinated by her. Thank the powers that be, Stanislas, that whatever other sins you and I commit, we are not obvious. It must be like striking the same note over and over again with the loud pedal on."

At about one o'clock the dance began, after the manner of fancy dress balls, to show signs of unravelling. The futurist Tiger had taken off his head

disclosing a mild countenance. The Eastern Houri had undone her alluring veil. Bluebeard's beard had come unstuck. There was a discarding of crooks, helmets, swords, sabots and wigs. Horatio Swann was heard to criticise "The only possible *bal masqués* are the ones at which the guests are compelled to appear in one type or one period of costume. Then there is a certain harmony in the *coup d'œil* which is quite pleasing. These clap-trap affairs merely show the fatuosity of mankind." Having so remarked he rose and went to bed.

The ballroom was gradually emptying, till there remained only a few couples revolving monotonously and indefatigably. All the life of the dance had ebbed out into the garden, where a balmy night of brilliant moonlight had woven a silver and shadowy enchantment round towers and walls, terraces and flowers. Below the outer ramparts the pines sank into blackness. The castle looked like a superb sailing-ship floating on the shining crest of a dark sea. Voices and laughter came from the shadows. There was the tapping of high heels on the paved walks, the sudden sheen of satin, glint of armour or sparkle of sequins. The moon invested with spurious glamour the masquerading mortals.

"Do you know that this is the most wonderful evening I've ever spent?" Dan was whispering to April as they sat together in a little turret.

"Oh, you funny boy, what a dear you are," replied the lovely girl in her "three three farthings Modom" tones.

The young man by her side received this remark rapturously. He did not know that it was her stock response to the first babblings of amorous youths. For older bachelors it was "Oh, you are wonderful" and for attractive and flirtatious married men, "Oh, aren't you rather naughty?".

After this conversational effort she sat elegantly in silence. Dan emboldened by champagne, said, "You have been sweet to me this evening, April. May I call you April? I don't know what I've done to deserve it all. How soft your arm is! Let me stroke it. You are a darling!"

She made no objection to his caresses, but in spite of the obvious delights of the situation he felt disappointed. It all seemed rather hard work. After a moment or two she drew away her arm indifferently and he wondered why he had failed to please her. He had an unhappy feeling that perhaps he had fondled her exquisite arm in a heavy-handed manner more suitable for stroking a dog's head than for philandering with a spoilt beauty. He tried hard to think of something ingratiating to say but no words came to him. His mind became stodgy, and a chill of depression crept over him as he realised that this glorious moment would never come again and that he was letting it slip away through his clumsy fingers.

She made a movement to rise and he managed to say, "Don't go in yet, April, have I annoyed you?"

She seemed genuinely surprised at this question, "Why, of course not, Mr. Cavanagh. What a quaint

idea! But it's awfully damp out here and I think I've got this one with Count Stanislas. He's such a marvellous dancer, I don't want to miss it. Let's wander back." There was no gainsaying the amiable flatness of her tones. Crestfallen, he followed her along the terrace. As he caught the ring of complacent masculine voices and appreciative feminine laughter he wondered crossly "what these blokes were saying to be making such a hit."

At the door of the ballroom, April smiled primly at his enthusiastic thanks and danced away with Count Stanislas. Dan watched them gloomily from the doorway till he was tapped on the arm by Ivor Sneyd who told him facetiously that "he had booked this dance with My Lady Bar and would he come with him?"

Half an hour later Dan in a more philosophical mood was sauntering aimlessly through the great hall, when April rose unexpectedly from a sofa and came towards him smiling, "Oh, Mr. Cavanagh, I've been hearing such exciting things about you. I mean about rescuing the Princess in the Black Forest. You seem to have been awfully heroic."

He drew himself up imperceptibly, threw out his chest and looked down at her with a masterful smile. She thought that he certainly looked attractive in his red coat with his stock rakishly showing off his young face. When he said in his most dashing manner, "I've got a bone to pick with you. Come on, you've got to give me this last dance, no

arguing!" she smiled encouragingly and allowed herself to be led away into the ballroom.

The band was playing a Valse, and Dan and April glided away together. He was determined to recover his lost ground, and incidentally in the process of doing so, stamped on a good many feet and cannonaded into several other couples, even having the audacity to call out high-spiritedly to an expert pair of performers as he ricocheted off them, "Hi! Steady at the corners! It's the old-fashioned waltz."

In the early hours of that morning, heaving about in his satin hung four-poster, too excited to fall into his usual log-like slumber, heated recollections of the dance passed and repassed through his mind. As he had flung his clothes on to the floor and prepared to throw himself into bed, he had paused wondering whether to wash his teeth. He had dismissed the idea contemptuously, but his glance had fallen on the snapshot of Fiona propped up on the writing-table. He had felt a pang of startled guilt, had quickly put out the light and had tried to banish the thought of her from his mind. But her reproachful image teased him as he lay awake in the leaden hours of dawn. How was it, he asked, that a constant fellow like himself could fall in love with two girls in so short a space of time?

Because there was no doubt that he had been in love with Fiona, was still in love with her for all he knew, and yet he was also in love with April. At least if it wasn't love, what was it? . . . She

was a wonderful-looking girl and she had got him taped from the word "go" . . . He could not help thinking that he had made *some* impression on her . . . the sitting-out in the garden had been a frost, no blinking at that, but that last dance had made up for it . . . that last Valse had done the trick all right. She hadn't said much but she had looked a lot . . . and there was always to-morrow. By Jove, that Ames chap had looked sick with jealousy after dinner . . . didn't blame him . . . but Fiona, how did she come in? After all, he had promised her in the forest that he would never forget her and he didn't wish to either. . . . She was a dear little thing and there was no doubt that she quite liked him . . . he did hope that he wasn't getting foully conceited but there it was . . . no escaping from facts. . . . Was it that Fiona was like real life and that April was like a story? Anyhow the last week had been pretty thrilling what with one thing and another. . . . It would rather open Alan's and Ronald's eyes if they could see him! . . . Fiona, the Princess, Swann and all the brainy lunatics at the castle . . . the food . . . marvellous food and then April . . . April and Fiona . . . or was it Fiona and April? He was growing too sleepy to decide. He just had enough mental activity left to struggle with feeble modesty against the conviction that he must be rather an unusual sort of fellow to fall in love twice in a week—then he fell asleep.

XIII

THE CASTLE

NEXT morning every trace of the serene sunshine of the last few days, their warm hushed hours filled to overflowing with the hum of bees and the scent of flowers, had vanished. The sky was muffled in greyness, the atmosphere was oppressive and the mountain slopes and the valley had taken on a variation of sickly greenish hues. At midday, Dan with a subdued air was strolling in the direction of the swimming pool. He had crawled out of bed an hour ago with a parched mouth, a headache and with a dismal outlook on life. The latter symptom had partly disappeared after a cold bath, and encouraged by this, he had decided to have a swim. The sole occupants of the oval, blue pool were Ivor Sneyd and a rubber horse. At a distance it was difficult to distinguish one from the other, both had such a look of pasty dampness. Ivor Sneyd greeted the newcomer grimly, and Dan, who was not himself in a conversational mood, dived in without answering. After a swim or two round the bath he climbed out, stood dripping on the edge and cast his eyes in the direction of Ivor Sneyd who was pushing

peevishly at the rubber horse which bobbed up and down persistently after him. He complained, "Drat this reptile, I can't get away from it!"

"Why don't you write a poem to it? That ought to drive it away," suggested Dan rudely.

"Oh, please don't indulge in school-boy witticisms. I feel so utterly fathomless this morning." He joined Dan and eyeing him pettishly said, "How disgustingly fit you look, considering that I saw you moaning at the bar quite frequently last night. Poor Tennyson! it seems almost obscene to quote him in these enlightened days." He gazed pensively at the water in which he was waggling his foot. Then in a voice which suggested that he had a false roof to his mouth, "Heard the latest re our host, re fish poisoning, re further obstruction to any work getting done? Quite shortly, that dear editor of the *Looker-On* will get tired of paying me to sit here and do nothing!"

"Who's poisoned?" Dan yawned back at him.

"I've already told you, dear lad. Must one *always* dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's' with you? Rex has been poisoned by eating fish—smelts in actual fact—such an ugly word, isn't it?"

"Don't see the word matters once it's inside one. But I'm sorry for the poor chap, especially with all this play-acting in hand."

Ivor Sneyd asked cynically, "What would you say if through an indiscreet half-opened door, you had seen a man reported to be suffering from acute poisoning, sitting up at a breakfast table in a lounge

suit, gorging on bacon and eggs, reading a newspaper and dictating a letter to his secretary?"

"I'd either say that he was heading for the cemetery or that he was a damned liar," said Dan after some consideration.

Ivor Sneyd bent towards him, staring at him with pale, amused eyes, "Bright lad! I think that your last clause sums up the smelt situation."

Dan made no reply but sat looking thoughtful, and Ivor Sneyd burbled on, "By the bye, I heard that the Princess has been trying to get Rex to talk over affairs with her and to settle up the contract this very morning. But of course the poor, dear man has been in too great pain to attend to any business. I myself saw the great Swann rampant outside Rex's bedroom, but by then the door was firmly locked and no one was allowed in on any excuse by doctor's orders. Of course that fat little doctor of his is very useful. I believe that Rex got his son out of some darksome scrape not long ago in Budapest."

After this remark, Ivor Sneyd slipped gracefully into the bosom of the pool. Dan remained meditative. He decided that he would take the first opportunity to find out from Horatio Swann on which day the Princess would be leaving the castle. He had now spent two nights at Erlenburg and though he had every reason for not wanting to depart, even his feckless mind was beginning to be troubled by the thought of the Wansteads. Having come to this decision, he banished the subject from his

thoughts and dived again into the water. He was kindly demonstrating a new stroke to Ivor Sneyd, who had resigned himself to the rubber horse and was clasping it round its neck, when Harry Ames suddenly appeared, threw off his trench coat, and without a word of warning tore along the spring board and plunged in right on top of them. To the two young men it seemed as if a hippopotamus had been dropped out of an aeroplane. They went under in a welter of scene designer, author, Dan and sea-horse. They came up again in a turmoil of splutters and foul language. The water reeled from side to side. Dan came to the surface choking, kicked himself free from his companions and swam angrily away. Harry Ames, trying in vain to disentangle himself from Ivor Sneyd's stranglehold, managed to tow the writhing, coughing youth to the edge of the pool, where Dan hauled him up unceremoniously, forced his head down between his knees and thumped him on the back.

"Look here, you've nearly given this poor chap a fit!" he told Harry Ames roughly.

"Water can't hurt anybody. He'll be all the better for it," replied Harry Ames imperturbably as he swam away.

Ivor Sneyd, who was trembling all over with the shock of his impromptu visit to the bottom of the swimming pool, received Dan's ministrations with gratitude. As soon as he could speak coherently, he rose to his feet and admonished the scene designer in a shrill voice.

"That was an extraordinarily caddish thing to do, Ames! But I am not going to demean myself by telling you what I think of you."

Harry Ames guffawed. Dan picked up his own and Ivor Sneyd's towels and sauntered off. Ivor Sneyd took his arm and said in a low voice, "You're a kind-hearted person. Kind hearts are all too rare in this craggy world. I'm very grateful, Cavanagh."

"Don't mention it," replied Dan good-naturedly but absent-mindedly. The sight, or rather the impact of Harry Ames, had brought back to him the thought of April. He felt that he could not bear to postpone seeing her any longer. What mood would she be in? Would she remember that last dance? The reaction after his swim, and the prospect of shortly setting eyes again on his lovely friend quickened his pulses and made him tingle all over with an almost painful excitement. But when he came to the castle he could not find her, although he wandered about the house looking for her. The enervating weather following after the festive hours of the dance had given an air of lassitude to the few guests whom he did meet.

A dispirited throng gathered together for luncheon, which was unpleasantly stimulated by a shattering argument between Mrs. Steele and a certain Herr Koptesmidt on the subject of international politics. Mrs. Steele had stated in no uncertain language her contempt for all forms of national consciousness, especially for what she termed "that

criminal expression of it known as patriotism." Herr Koptesmidt, who belonged to the old school of political thought, agreed gravely that there was a necessity for a great advance in international sense of fellowship, but refused to admit that all distinguishing national characteristics and prejudices would ever be done away with, or that there would be any advantage in their extinction. Over *poulet au riz de crème,* they raged their wordy warfare, while the rest of the party, reduced willy-nilly to sulky silence, sat by, eating. Ivor Sneyd, sitting next to Dan, whispered with a shrug of his shoulders that Mrs. Steele was definitely anti-social and ought to be locked up, at any rate during mealtime. She evidently thought that it was her job to carry the world and its affairs on her shoulders—a sort of female Atlas. But then Atlas didn't go about pontificating in polite society, he added with his snigger.

Dan was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to reply except by a grin. April was evidently taking her refreshment upstairs, though several of her fellow beauties were present, wearing haughty expressions under their elaborate make-up. He wondered when he would see his lady-love once more. Perhaps at tea-time? Then he must also try and find an opportunity for his talk with Horatio Swann. There was no sign of the Master, beyond the fact that a footman had taken two nuts and a glass of red wine away for him on a salver. Someone had remarked deferentially that he was at work on a study of the head of Rex Guggenheim's negro serv-

ant. It appeared that La Fiorivanti never came down for any luncheon. Towards the end of the meal, there had been some talk of the host's indisposition and a discussion as to why Rex alone among the many smelt eaters in the castle had thus been suddenly struck down. The incident had evidently left behind it a feeling of gastronomic apprehension. The general opinion was summed up in the words of the French dress designer who was to be responsible for many of the costumes in the miracle play. "When the stomach cannot confide in the chef of a millionaire, when can he feel safe?" Ivor Sneyd nudged Dan who in return gave him a knowing glance.

The afternoon dragged itself stuffily on towards tea-time. Dan wandered into the library and sat for some time yawning over illustrated papers, trying to interest himself unsuccessfully in the doings of an outside world that seemed unreal to him at the moment. In conformity to his age and type, he seldom stepped mentally beyond the boundaries of his own little universe. He lived contentedly in the immediate present, rarely looking backwards or forwards. Since his arrival at Schloss Erlenburg it had taken all his concentration to keep abreast with the present. His restless eye alighted after a while on a handsome gramophone and a stack of records. He got up and had just rummaged, found, and put on a favourite fox-trot when in came Miss U.S.A., Mrs. Steele, Harry Ames and Professor Weir. They made straight for a table and chairs that stood

in a corner of the room, settled themselves down and began to indulge in that most ferocious form of bloodless warfare—the game of bridge. Dan stopped the gramophone, collapsed lankily in an armchair with a copy of the *Times* and began to read,

> The score was only ninety-two, when the fourth wicket fell and Jackson returned to the pavilion. Lovibond remained in the middle to run for O'Brien who . . .

but his perusal of Test Match news was interrupted by the running fire of the bridge party, which after the manner of the game was rising steadily from acid restraint to unrestrained vindictiveness, with periods of ominous silence.

"No bid . . . no bid . . ." "My lead" (aggressively) . . . "No, mine I think . . ." (with finality) . . . "Oh, *really*" (incredulously) . . . "Yes, it *is* here . . ." (snubbingly) . . . "Gee . . . your clubs filled up all my gaps. . . ." (triumphantly) . . . "I've got a club, spade and a heart . . ." (meekly) "I make it . . ." (decisively) . . . "I'm afraid I don't . . ." (argumentatively) . . . (Silence for a few minutes) . . . "I had no idea that Professor Weir had as many as that" (angrily) . . . "Well, I couldn't tell you, could I?" (in bated accents.)

A medley of protests, snaps and pithy transatlantic comments followed, then Mrs. Steele hurled at Professor Weir, "Partner, for the third time,

please lead from strength into weakness, and while you ruin my excellent hand I'll go into the garden."

He cringed under her wrath and mumbled apologies.

Dan looked up, caught the Professor's harassed eyes and grinned sympathetically at him. There was a lull only broken by the sound of the shuffling of cards. They played for a time in silence, then after a few disconnected examples of repartee, the American girl drawled brightly:

"Say, Mr. Ames, do you know that there are more guys walking barefoot in New York than you can hope to count and all through not leading trumps?" Harry Ames grunted savagely.

More silence, but a silence quivering now with hostility. The unnerved Professor revoked twice and caused Mrs. Steele to break out at him again in accents of despairing contempt. "My dear man, you can't play for nuts! You never hold a card so what in the world *do* you play for?"

"To oblige," he bleated defiantly. He went on in a voice that shook slightly with humiliation, "I'm seriously thinking of giving it up."

"Perhaps it would be wiser," retorted Mrs. Steele encouragingly, after which agreeable interlude the party took up their cards and continued the rubber. They were an example of a certain type of bridge four. Mrs. Steele—the accomplished bully; the American girl—the unruffled player; Harry Ames—the bold bad player; and Professor Weir—everybody's victim. Dan, listening against his will to their

verbal stabs, wondered how it was that apparently self-respecting persons swallowed insults at bridge, that at any other time would lead to blows or to libel proceedings! As he rose to go, the American girl called out to him, "Hello, you've been sitting very quiet. Do you play this game?" and when he replied in the negative:

"You ought to learn."

This was not the first time that he had been warmly urged to add bridge to his accomplishments. He replied slyly, "I'm a peace-loving little chap. I'm going to wait till the next war for my fighting," and left them.

In the centre hall he came across April sitting smoking a cigarette with a pretty air of crossness. He rushed eagerly up to her.

"Hello, there you are! I've been looking for you everywhere for hours."

"Really?" her tone was uninterested. He was taken aback but continued coaxingly, "What about coming for a walk in the garden?"

"No, thanks," she answered coldly.

Dan stared at her disconcerted, then said in a less confident voice,

"You *did* look ripping—last night."

She minced back,

"Oh, did you really think so? I never care for that gown myself though most people are improved by fancy dress. I hardly recognised you just now."

He grew red. The rudeness of her manner and the indifference in her glance left him bewildered.

There was not the faintest trace of her friendliness of the night before. She was a different girl, and a girl who plainly had no further use for him. He stood watching her reproachfully, but she looked past him. Her attitude expressed boredom and a wish to get rid of him. Stung by her behaviour he was about to make a dignified retreat when Count Stanislas approached them. April brightened up.

"Hello, Count! Have a cigarette? Before I forget, Count, I want you to come to-night at half-past nine to a little cocktail party in my room. Some of the girls are coming."

Reminded by her own remark that the masculine element might be in the minority at her entertainment, she turned with belated cordiality and invited Dan. He longed to refuse, he longed to accept. His expiring, but still palpitating infatuation finally overcame his proper pride. He mumbled grudgingly that he would be there that evening and then escaped from the scene of his disillusionment. Aimlessly he walked through the garden, chewing the cud of his amorous mortification. His rapturous fancies had given place to feelings of depression. Though he intended to go to April's party to-night if only to show his defiance, he realised that everything was over for him as far as she was concerned. What a fool he had been to imagine that she had ever taken any interest in him! But how could one tell with women? They led one on, they let one down! They were never the same two days running. They were more unreliable than secondhand

cars, not nearly so affectionate as dogs, and far harder to manage than horses!

He had come to the confines of the garden and passed through a gate into a flowery and steeply-sloping meadow. Horatio Swann was standing there, talking to a couple of cream-coloured goats to whom he was offering pieces of cake. Dan's impulse was to turn back for he did not like to disturb the great man, and also wished to nurse his own wounded heart in solitude. Then he remembered that he had been waiting for a chance to broach the subject of the Princess' departure. Whereas before he had only been prompted by duty, he now had a dreary reason for wishing to leave Erlenburg. So he advanced on the trio and asked Horatio Swann deferentially whether he might speak to him.

Horatio Swann listened to him graciously, then pausing in his ministrations to the goats, answered in majestic accents:

"You were quite right, my boy, to come and ask me. It's time you left, it's time I left and above all it's time the Princess Vanda left. But you need not worry, it's all arranged. I've written a note to our poisoned and poisonous host, demanding that the contract shall be signed to-morrow afternoon at four-thirty. That gives him plenty of time to recover. There is no valid reason that I can see for delaying it any longer. I've never heard," he rumbled on, "that fish-poisoning affected the handwriting, and though I don't suppose that Guggen-

heim looks particularly pretty in his dressing-gown, the Princess will no doubt be quite ready to transact the business at his bedside if he thinks he is not well enough to get up. We will leave the next morning. I hope you will be able to get us to Rome in three or four days. Does this fit in with your plans?" he added with a polished courtesy which he often showed to the socially unimportant, while his more influential acquaintances sometimes looked for it in vain.

Dan thanked him and was turning away, but Horatio Swann motioned to him to stay and suggested that he should accompany him for a walk. They strolled along the mountain path which ambled its way down the field towards the pine woods. In the dull light of the overcast afternoon the wild flowers were like jewels amongst the shimmering veil of the long grasses. Rusty red sorrel, the tender blue of forget-me-nots, the regal blue of cornflowers, the fairy purple of harebells, the sunbeam gold of buttercups, creamy meadow-sweet, daisies, vetch and clover, were tangled together in the divine untidiness of Nature.

Horatio Swann pointed with his stick.

"This is the sort of field that found favour with the Early Primitives for their backgrounds."

"Yes, sir, it is."

The painter looked at him from under his eyebrows.

"Have you ever seen a Primitive?"

"No, I haven't. But I take your word for it."

Horatio Swann laughed. "Well, you might do worse, and faith is a very good thing to have."

There was silence.

"Let's sit down here. I'm going to tell you something so that if on our journey to Rome any suspicious-looking persons come up to you and ask indiscreet questions about the Princess' movements you'll know what to do."

Dan had not the slightest idea what Horatio Swann was talking about, but he was always ready for intrigue and mystery so he nodded his head gravely. His elderly companion remained lost in thought for a little while, then with a suddenness which made Dan jump, said earnestly, "Princess Vanda Fiorivanti is a very unhappy lady. We must do all we can to help her."

"Rather!" agreed Dan warmly.

"Yes, you're a nice young fellow. Not affected or spoilt so far. But no doubt that phase is still to come! I am going to tell you a little about the Princess' affairs so that you will know what is happening. She is on the verge of ruin. One push and she'll be over the precipice for ever. On the top of many other indiscretions she has spent incredible sums of money belonging to her husband, Prince Andrea Fiorivanti, that she had no right to touch. They have been separated for years. He is an abominable man. Now, he maintains that she is no longer responsible for her actions and he is hunting her down. There are detectives after her at this moment trying to collect evidence of insanity against

her. The brute hopes to get her locked up in a *maison de santé.*"

"A what?"

Horatio Swann looked at him for a moment then in a low voice,

"A mad house! A mad house. They'll pretend of course that it is for a treatment for drugs—or something like that."

"Gosh, that's pretty steep!"

Horatio Swann eyed Dan moodily.

"Yes, you may well show horror. No doubt the Princess is, from her detractors' standpoint, non-moral, proud, foolish, extravagant, spoilt and sometimes even cruel, but she is beautiful, and before her nerves began to master her, poor lady, she was more than beautiful, she was an inspiration. There will not be another Vanda Fiorivanti in this generation! The mould is broken. Her friends love her not so much for what she is, as for what she has been, and for what she has meant to them. That is what some love is, an unpayable debt, but," grumpily, "you can't be expected to understand this at your age and you are probably thinking me a confounded old bore!"

His voice sounded tired and cross. Then after a silence which Dan did not like to break, he continued, "She had to leave Paris on this trip at a moment's notice and two days earlier than she intended to. She came in that new car of hers, to my house in the early hours of the morning and we all bundled off

secretly. Can't tell you how disgustingly cheerful that fellow Ames was in the dawn. He was staying a few days with me. I can't remember why I asked him in the first instance, except that we were all bound for the same destination some time during this month, which of course was no valid reason. Anyhow the object of the Princess' visit to Rome is to rally some San Castello relations round her. She was a San Castello. They're a very influential Roman family. Even Andrea Fiorivanti will think twice before seizing her if they take her part. I'm going with her to help her, poor lady! Her winning card is this engagement with Rex Guggenheim. It sets her on her feet financially, and practically makes it impossible for Fiorivanti to cast doubts on her sanity. She met Rex Guggenheim at my house and that is one reason why I'm seeing her through this aggravating business." He rapped Dan over the knees with his walking stick.

"All you've got to do, my young friend, is to keep your mouth shut during the journey. No information about her return to this place. I know that I can trust you, that is why we like having you as our chauffeur. We put up with your alarming driving on account of your honourable soul!"

He laughed sarcastically and got up.

Dan said excitedly, "Awfully good of you to tell me all this. You can bet your last box of paints that I won't let you down. As for any of those stinking detectives, they'd better not come nosing round after the Princess. Our village blacksmith,

who is one of the finest fighters in the countryside, taught me a little trick once that would put them to sleep before they could say 'knife' or 'oh la la!' or whatever foreigners say!" He gave a hilarious laugh in which Horatio Swann joined grimly.

One result of Dan's conversation with the painter was to distract his mind from his gnawing disillusionment, and to give him an air of aloof dignity as he sat in the corner of April's pink and silver room at her cocktail party that night.

He felt that he was now involved in important issues affecting a persecuted Princess' happiness and honour, and that he could afford to ignore the social trivialities and slippery smart talk that was being bandied about between the pyjamaed guests. This was just as well as he was being ignored! Except for handing around and sampling the refreshments, he was taking no active part in the festivities. April, perfect with the perfection of the dressmaker's salon, in her white satin and white furred smoking suit, embroidered with bunches of spring flowers, had so far addressed one sentence to him, which was on the subject of a dish of fried chips, and consisted of a prim, "Put them down there, please."

His moribund passion having received no stimulants, he was left to derive what comfort he could from a feeling of proud and embittered superiority. As he listened critically to her vapid remarks, and her laugh, which he now mentally classified as being "not out of the top drawer," he began to wonder what he had seen in her, thus comforting himself

with the great consolation of the rejected admirer! Of course he admitted to himself she was a "good-looker," but then there was not much expression in her face and she had a sickening good opinion of herself. She evidently had no use for chaps who were not able to tie themselves into conversational knots, like Ivor Sneyd for instance, who at this moment was talking with considerable effect at her and at the little circle of beauties and young men.

He was saying: "Marriage? No, Stanislas, dear lad, I refuse to be inveigled into a discussion of it. It's like a well-trodden carpet, the more one beats it conversationally, the more dust comes out of it."

Then with regard to a well-known politician, "He's failed, my dear girl, because he's such a dead end of righteousness. He's more manly and upright than can be borne nowadays. He would have done splendidly in the Mid-Victorian age when the British nation could not distinguish between public life and private morality. Now we are all so enlightened, so admittedly frail, that undiluted rectitude simply aggravates us."

Or, "No, she is a bore that woman, she is always playing with the Beautiful and True."

Then, "Yes, I quite agree, my dear chap, the hostility between in-laws is not a fit subject for joking. It so very often embitters the early married days of the unfortunate Newly-Weds, and after all, happiness in sex matters is only a fragile bubble! Am I being dreadfully sentimental, people? Stop me if I am!"

When the wireless relayed the strains of one of Verdi's operas, he was heard to plead frantically, "Switch off those dreadful sounds—I cannot stand musical macaroni."

The click-clack of the chatter rattled on. The room with its shaded lights was hazy with smoke, and the atmosphere was only slightly freshened by the sultry night air that came in through the wide open casement windows. Several people complained of headaches and the cocktail shaker was in great demand. A dance record was put on the gramophone, and Miss U.S.A. jumped to her feet, and with terrific verve performed an eccentric dance. Her body jerked with the rhythm of the crazy tune, her slim arms and legs flung themselves into grotesque attitudes, a wide childish grin spread over her pretty face. She was encored again and again till she finally fell laughing on a divan, waving her legs in the air, in a last effort to keep time with the whirling record.

Dan, who, during the performance, had enjoyed himself for the first time that evening, forgot his self-consciousness and gave vent to a whoop of approval. He was rewarded by the American girl asking him for a cigarette and inviting him to come and sit beside her. They engaged in an animated conversation, and he began to feel less dissatisfied with life.

A sleek young man was looking through the gramophone records, and after selecting one, announced that he was going to dance. His subsequent

wriggling and squirmings might have been those of an eel trying to get out of a hair shirt! He gave the impression that his limbs were only held together by an intense desire to show off. These terpsichorean writhings were greeted with prolonged applause. Count Stanislas, however, was heard to murmur disdainfully, "Ba—it's only a milk and soda edition of the Danse de Ventre. I have seen it done properly in Algiers."

Miss U.S.A. giggled to Dan. "That was hot dancing! My momma would spank me good and hearty if I tried those antics on."

"Yes, he's rather a suggestive sort of Dago, but all the same I'd like to be able to hoof it like that! I expect his parents had him filleted when he was young!"

Dan was just getting into really friendly terms with her, when the good-looking French dress-designer came up with words, "Mees U.S.A., I have had a very beautiful new thought for your angel robe. Let me tell you. . . ."

Dan reluctantly made room for him and was soon relegated again to the position of looker-on. An air of languor began to pervade the party. The conversation had become whispered and intimate. Count Stanislas posed picturesquely by the long window, gazing out into the night, started back as a flash of lightning stabbed across the sky. "A tempest," he anounced dramatically but unnecessarily as a clap of thunder drowned his words.

The room was lit up again by a sudden flash, and

the windows were quickly closed and the curtains drawn to shut out the storm. Someone muttering about the dangers of fusing put out all the lights except one alabaster reading lamp.

Ivor Sneyd said, "Gather together, people" and the party settled down on the divan and cushions. Masculine heads were leant against accommodating silken knees, feminine heads bent down coyly to receive flattery or confidences, little shrieks of alarm from the foreign ladies as the thunder crashed over the castle were soothed by the caressing of hands. Miss U.S.A. said in a low voice to Dan, "I've got a hunch that this is going to turn into a necking party" and turned confidentially to her French neighbour who was soon bending over her and whispering out the story of his struggle to fame. Dan could see April, a gleaming indistinct figure sitting on the far side of the group, in dalliance with Count Stanislas. It was all very different, he thought drearily, from the night before, and he longed to leave this party which was providing pleasure and excitement for everyone except himself. He was squeezed in between the Frenchman's back and the door, which was cut off from the rest of the room by a tall, painted screen. Rising gingerly, as though he was preparing to walk on eggs, he slunk behind the screen, opened the door carefully and bolted through it. Its handle slipped from his grasp and it slammed after him. He paused in the dark corridor listening apprehensively. There was a second's silence from within and then a high feminine laugh. He hurried

away. As he turned a corner he saw the burly figure of Harry Ames advancing towards him.

"Hello, young Cavanagh! Is April's party still going strong? I've been working so I couldn't come before."

Dan, who had not forgotten the bathing-pool episode, answered stiffly that the party was "still on its legs."

Harry Ames threw at him cheerfully, "What do you think of my dressing-gown? It's made out of a travelling rug, eighteen and six!" and swept on without waiting for a reply.

As he stood in his room listening to the receding thunder, Dan realised that this evening had definitely put an end to last night's brief enchantment.

XIV

THE CASTLE

HE awoke next day to the oppressive sound of rain. A dull toneless light filtered through the curtains and his room, which on sunny mornings was aglow like the heart of a ruby, had now faded into sombreness. Having grasped these unencouraging meteorological facts, he decided to sleep on and burrowed his head deeper under the bedclothes. He did not succeed in actually falling to sleep again, but managed very comfortably to keep his mind blankly impervious to outside influences. A buxom maid came in, smiling, with tea and bread-and-butter, drew the curtains and went out again ungreeted by the sullen inmate of the satin curtained bed. Time went on. The big clock in the courtyard struck ten clashing chimes. Dan firmly refrained from counting them. As far as he could judge from the depths of his cosy torpor, there was nothing worth while getting up for. Without actually admitting it to himself, he knew that as a result of a certain young woman's shabby behaviour the day before, to-day could only offer him boredom and dejection. The moment that he rose from his couch he would be faced with an anti-climax.

With the possible exception of a Problem, nothing was more distasteful to his debonair nature than an anti-climax. This being the case, his common sense urged him to remain prone physically and morally till Life once more knocked harshly at the door. At half past ten precisely, Life knocked and came in hysterically in the person of Ivor Sneyd wearing pale yellow pyjamas and an orange dressing-gown. Even the unobservant Dan, blinking at him with one eye over the edge of the sheet, was surprised at his distraught countenance. His eyes were red-rimmed and seemed about to disappear into his head, and he was of a really alarming pallor that partook almost of a greenish hue. He was evidently struggling to master a profound emotion. Falling onto a chair he gave way to a series of ejaculations, calling on Highest Heaven to witness to his distress. Dan, reversing the supernatural order, asked him abruptly what the hell was the matter with him.

In reply, Ivor Sneyd called for a glass of water and as Dan showed no signs of playing the genial host, walked wearily to the bathroom and emerged again from behind the hangings, holding a tumbler which clicked against his teeth as he gulped down its contents. He sat down on the end of Dan's bed and with the back of his hand pressed against his forehead, launched into a confused account of sundry dire doings which had occurred in the east wing of the castle during the early hours of the morning. Halfway through the recitation Dan suddenly

stopped him, asked him to wait a moment, hauled himself up in bed, took a cigarette from a tin by his bedside, lit it and suggested judiciously that Ivor Sneyd should "put the record on again from the very beginning, then he might have some idea what it was all about."

Ivor Sneyd sighed despairingly and repeated his tale of woe. It appeared that Harry Ames' appearance in April's room at twelve o'clock the night before had broken up the party. With unforgivable tactlessness, he had switched on all the lights, had collared the conversation and had altogether introduced an undesirable note of breeziness into the nicely-balanced gathering. The guests had not been long in dispersing after this intrusion with the exception of Count Stanislas and Ames himself. Ivor Sneyd had been surprised and he did not mind confessing, hurt at the inexplicable pleasure that the Count had showed in April's society that evening and his evident determination to outstay Harry Ames. He had only been able to explain his friend's peculiar behaviour by the fact that Stanislas was highly strung and easily affected by stimulants ("as Slavs often are, you know") and that he had taken an instantaneous dislike to the bluff designer of scenery on his arrival at Erlenburg. Anyhow he, Sneyd, had thought that the most dignified thing for him to do was to retire to a neighbouring bedroom and to remain there chattering with the talented executor of the Danse de Ventre, till it was time to escort the Count to bed. It was indeed fortunate

as things turned out that friendship had inspired him to take this course.

Ten minutes had scarcely passed before a thud, a shout, and a scream came in quick succession from April's room. Ivor Sneyd and his companion rushed to the scene of the affray where they found Ames beside himself with rage stemming a cut with a handkerchief, April screaming with fright, and the Count fallen back on the divan and pawing the air with a bread-and-butter knife.

People had hurried in from other rooms just in time to prevent Harry Ames and the Count having another go at each other. Both had shouted their versions of the quarrel at the top of their voices, and April had added to the uproar by breaking into noisy sobs, as she was led away by female friends.

It was not till Ivor Sneyd had managed to conduct the frenzied Count back to his bedroom that he had ascertained what had occurred. Apparently Harry Ames had most unwarrantably accused the Count of wishing to stay on in April's room for unavowable reasons, and had announced his own intention of sitting there till breakfast time if necessary, in order to frustrate the Pole's nefarious designs on his young hostess. The Count, astounded and outraged by this insinuation, had risen to his feet—he was so indignant that as he afterwards related to Ivor, his legs had nearly given way under him—and had flipped Harry Ames across the face. The latter had immediately knocked him down ("the butcher, the butcher" shuddered Ivor at this point of his narra-

tive). His de Lezcienki blood afire, Stanislas had staggered to his feet and seizing the handy bread-and-butter knife had dug into Ames' muscular arm. (It was a sharp knife, having been selected for the purpose of cutting sandwiches.)

"We broke in just in time to prevent murder," moaned Ivor Sneyd pausing to take another sip of water. "Oh, the horror of it all! My poor Stanislas being mixed up in a melodramatic affair like that, on account of a vulgar little mannequin with the looks of a fashion-plate and the brains of a hen! The irony of it! the irony of it! That common girl and the fastidious Stanislas!"

Dan made a movement of protest, but Ivor Sneyd was too absorbed to notice it and went on tragically:

"Yes, it's been a shattering affair and it's not over yet. Stanislas declares that he will call Ames out and fight a duel with him, and Ames is reported to be saying that he refuses to stay another night under the same roof as poor Stanislas. I can see that he is going to make fearful trouble with Rex Guggenheim. Stanislas declares that his future is in jeopardy. I've had a terrible night by the poor boy's bedside. He was ill for hours—devastatingly ill."

"Yes," interrupted Dan brutally, "I bet he was. Sick as a dog, I expect. From what you say he seems to have handled a pretty good glass, taking it all round. I can quite see Ames being pretty irritating, and it was a bit uncalled-for to knock the other fellow down. Still it was a pity your Count friend used a knife on him. Rather a dagoish trick

and might lead to blood poisoning. It's not done."

Ivor Sneyd's eyes lit up with temper. "Spare me a recital of the public school code, *please!* I am really not feeling strong enough this morning to stand a Speech Day exposition of our hypocritical British idea of honour. You'll be quoting Newbolt to me next and be asking me to 'play up—play up and play the game.' I am afraid that my friend Count Stanislas de Lezcienki cannot be fitted into your idea of an 'English gentleman'! In other words he is not stupid, prejudiced, uneducated and lacking all vestige of temperament!" His voice broke on a shrill note of anger.

Dan looked at him hard for a moment with narrowed eyes, then his face relaxed and he remarked calmly, "I say, don't work yourself into a jelly like this. It's not worth it. Is there anything I can do to help to clear up the mess?" Ivor Sneyd subsided into exhausted gratitude. He admitted that it was to obtain Dan's assistance that he had come to see him this morning. All his remaining energy seemed to be concentrated on extricating his friend from the consequences of his ill-timed juggling with the bread-and-butter knife. He explained that considerable harm would be done to the Count's budding career if the infuriated Harry Ames managed to prejudice Rex Guggenheim against him. It was not only a question of immediate unpleasantness but of future engagements. Ivor dithered eagerly, "The film world is so dreadfully overcrowded, and these abominable talkies have only made it more difficult

for poor Stanislas on account of his Slav accent. Still when all is said and done, Rex only said the obvious when he declared that Stanislas was one of the handsomest young men he had ever seen during all his years of showmanship, and it's no good disguising the fact that it lies in Rex's hands to make or break him. And you see Rex and that odious Ames have been personal friends for years. Oh, dear! I do feel so worried!"

When Dan impatiently demanded "how he himself came into the picture," Ivor Sneyd pulled himself together once more and begged him to go and suggest to Ames that a mutual apology (not necessarily made in person) would clear the whole matter up. He could not go himself on this diplomatic mission. He dared not trust himself to even speak to his friend's assailant—not after Stanislas' dark night of suffering . . . here he stopped rather abruptly, checked by the grin on Dan's face. After a few seconds' solemn deliberation, Dan agreed to interview Harry Ames and to do his best to bring about a reconciliation. The anxious Sneyd blessed him for a tower of strength and left him to go and lie down, and possibly, he murmured, scribble off a few verses.

As he dressed, Dan felt pleasantly self-important. Though he had successfully concealed the fact, he had been excited by the narration of the bloody drama in whose aftermath he was now to be involved. He was to take on the meritorious rôle of peacemaker. Ivor Sneyd, poor ape, evidently looked upon him as a tower of strength in time of trouble,

in fact had said so—which was all the more gratifying as Aunt Maureen had been fond of describing her youngest nephew as "a broken reed."

He decided to fulfil his charitable task at once. As it was now quarter past eleven, breakfast was out of the question. Anyhow he did not feel very hungry after the cocktails of the night before, and he could make up at luncheon time for this fast. Chewing a biscuit, he made his way, after an inquiry from a maid, to Harry Ames' turret chamber. It was unoccupied. Dan gave a rapid and admiring glance at a collection of fairy-like models of scenery, arranged in company with a heap of rough drafts, plans, drawing-boards and a T-square on a large bare table, then he descended the winding stairs again and was wondering in what part of the immense castle to continue his search, when he met Professor Weir, who told him that he had just seen Harry Ames going into Mrs. Steele's apartments.

The idea of penetrating into that lady's private bower caused Dan to hesitate for a moment, but he had not been born a Cavanagh for nothing. "Plunge on" was the family motto, and he was shortly rapping at Mrs. Steele's room. He was mentally rehearsing his opening speech to Ames when Mrs. Steele opened the door herself, and glared at him with an unwelcoming expression.

He asked, "Er—may I speak to Ames—Mr. Ames?"

"How did you know he was here?" Her intonation was like the warning growl of a lioness dis-

turbed at her meal. It was the first opportunity that she had had of a quiet talk with her childhood friend, since his arrival, and she had a great deal to say to him.

"Well, if you really have something important to say to him you can come in, but look sharp about it. I've got a lot of work to do."

Dan followed her in with false docility. The bedroom which Rex Guggenheim with his unfailing sense of the fitness of things, had allotted to Mrs. Steele, was a striking example of the ultra-modern interior decoration. The walls, ceiling and floor were composed of a washable shiny grey metal. The room had rounded corners and was innocent of mouldings or trimmings of any description. The furniture was made of metal and was a triumph of under-statement as regards design.

The bed was slightly reminiscent of an operating table. Dressing-table, cupboards and bookshelves were built into the wall. The general impression of the room was nakedness, logic and efficiency. Bulging out of a chair, which, looked at sideways, had a slight resemblance to the letter Z, sat Harry Ames, his sleeves rolled up and a newly arranged bandage on his arm. He looked sulky and stared crossly with his round brown eyes at the new-comer.

"Hullo! what do you want?"

Dan forgot his well-chosen words of propitiation and blurted out, "I've come about that Polish fellow who tried to knife you."

At this Mrs. Steele let off her indignation so violently that it seemed to whizz through the air like a shell.

"Disgraceful affair! I've been telling Mr. Ames he ought to have him up for assault."

"And I've been asking you," broke in the wounded hero, "to mind your own business and to get on with the bandaging. I have got no time for lawsuits. I happen to have something better to do."

"You're arguing from wrong premises," snapped back Mrs. Steele, goaded by her repressed love for the wayward Harry into aggressiveness towards him. "It's not a question of your personal convenience, it's a question of teaching those sort of undisciplined people to realise that they are living in an age of trade unions and aeroplanes, not of duelling swords and snuff-boxes. That's what annoys me about the whole affair, the silly emotionalism of it. I expect you thought that you were being what used to be called 'chivalrous,' which we know now to be only another word for masculine conceit and sexuality."

Harry Ames heaved himself out of the metal chair and stood over her angrily.

"So you really imagine that I was going to allow that Pole to make slimy advances to that lovely child?"

"Child!" laughed Mrs. Steele with a laugh as metallic as the surrounding furniture. "Why, she's twenty-six if she's a day, though she has the nerve to state that she is only twenty-one!"

"That's pretty cattish for an advanced thinker like yourself," sneered Harry Ames.

"I have no intention of concealing my opinion of a useless, brainless, conceited young woman. She is the type of female parasite that has got to be stamped out of our modern Society if the world is to make any noticeable advance."

"April is one of the sweetest young creatures . . ." began the lovelorn Harry, but Mrs. Steele cut in triumphantly, "April! You mean Gertie Soper—that's her real name if you want to know. I can tell you that for a fact! What you can see in her even from the lowest viewpoint, i.e., the physical, I fail to understand. Why she's washed-out, yes, far too pale, and so skinny. *Spindly* I call her!"

"Yes, you would," burst out Harry Ames rolling his eyes. "That's the favourite taunt of you clumsy thick-set women when you meet a graceful girl like April who happens to be of the race-horse build, not the cart-horse type. It's for us men to say whether they are too thin or not. One soon finds out when one gets close enough. Personally I like to be able to feel their ribs!"

Dan, who had been standing by tongue-tied, paid tribute to this last retort with a loud laugh. Then he caught sight of a sudden convulsion of Mrs. Steele's usually set features and exclaimed, "Oh, I say, what's the matter?"

Mrs. Steele murmured, "Oh, Harry, I didn't think you'd ever insult me like this," and with a sharp sniff

and moist eyes, turned and hurried into the adjoining dressing-room.

Harry Ames grew red in the face and said uncomfortably, "Damned nonsense, I didn't insult her, did I?" then without waiting for a reply said brusquely, "You'd better clear out of here. You're the cause of all this fuss!"

Dan, the peacemaker, gave him an angry look and beat a hasty retreat. Hurrying back to his room in a confused and undecided state of mind he met Horatio Swann striding down the corridor looking like an angry prophet.

"Oh, you!" he ejaculated, pausing to eye him fiercely. Dan felt suddenly weak about the knees. What was coming now? Horatio Swann went on, "This is a pretty state of affairs!"

"Yes," agreed Dan. "I've just been trying to patch things up between Ames and the Count."

"What? I am not talking about them! Yes, I heard something about that ludicrous affair. Very good thing for Ames to have lost some blood, he's much too full-blooded. As for that Polish Jew who puts a 'de' onto an already fictitious name, it's a pity Ames did not polish him off once and for all. No," he went on in his deep voice, "what is so outrageous is that Rex should have had the audacity to put off the signing of the contract till this afternoon and keep us waiting about like this. The Princess is getting very impatient with all this talk of fish-poisoning, and blames me for not having forced him to arrange the rendezvous for this morning. But I

didn't feel justified in going against doctor's orders and all that." He stood glaring at Dan as if the delay was somehow his fault. When the latter suggested tentatively that he should go and overhaul the Princess' car preparatory to the next morning's departure, Horatio Swann said shortly, "You'd better" and stalked away.

Dan swore under his breath. Unpleasantness seemed to be lurking behind every door and in every corner of the castle to-day. He wondered whether he would ever get free of this crew of brilliant and uncomfortable people. He had never looked upon himself, or been encouraged to look upon himself, as a shining example of common sense and stability, but since his brief sojourn in Schloss Erlenburg, he was beginning to lean on Daniel Cavanagh more and more, for the simple reason that there appeared to be no one else in the household fit to lean on.

He stood for some time smoking a pipe by his bedroom window, and staring out across the valley. The rain showed no signs of abating. It came down in sheets as though a heavenly shower-bath had been turned on. The peaks of the distant mountains were hidden in mist, their dark slopes looked like the flanks of titanic elephants. He thought gloomily, for the first time since his arrival at the Schloss, of his parents' possible feelings and of the Wansteads' probable annoyance. He was now four days behind the scheduled time of his arrival at Palermo, and it would be at least another four days before their expectant eyes were gladdened by the sight of him.

After further moody meditation, he decided that it might be a sound move to despatch another post-card to Sicily, to bolster up his previous communication from Freiburg. He chose the most imposing-looking view of the Schloss that he could find in the paper-rack on the writing-table, and wrote very carefully in his crabbed writing, "So sorry about this unavoidable delay. Please expect me to fetch up in about four days' time. Kindest regards to you both. D. Cavanagh."

Then he took up the snapshot of Fiona and looked at it thoughtfully. He now felt tenderly repentant and thankful that she was in happy ignorance of what he now termed his mistaken "pash" for the lovely but shallow-natured April. He told himself that he saw with perfect clearness which of the two girls he loved. There could be no comparison between them. Fiona was a genuine little pearl—he thought admiringly. How well she understood him and how sweet and sympathetic she was! He vowed that he would never underrate her attractions again. However, no harm was done!

Then the thought of his parents again crossed his mind. Had he irretrievably spoilt his chance with the Wansteads by this delay? The idea of his father's and mother's disappointment made him feel very unhappy for a second. He was beginning to long for the moment to come when he could show them once and for all that he was not such a failure as fate with its chain of unfortunate events seemed determined to prove him. He was acutely aware of

the fact that from a parental point of view the last week had been an unforgivable scandal. Yet at the same time, he knew obscurely that his recent experiences had given him the confidence in himself that he had lacked in the past. He had never believed that he would succeed at anything and had consequently never made any sustained effort to do so, being more than content with having a good time and with being liked. He had always fitted agreeably into circumstances, now a determination surged over him to make circumstances sometimes fit in with him. He knocked out his pipe on the edge of the fourteenth century *prie-dieu* and filled with he-man resolutions left the room briskly to go and overhaul the Princess' car.

He spent a pleasant hour in the white-tiled garage of the Pannonia-Svitza, in the big yard, round which was grouped a miniature village of garages and loose boxes. He had stopped a friendly-looking Austrian mechanic who was running across the dripping cobbles, and acting on his new-born resolve to be thorough and to leave nothing to chance, had at once commandeered his services. He had no intention of relying on his own scanty mechanical knowledge. Together they bent reverently over the inner workings of the car, examining her and attending to her wants. Finally when all was finished and she was supplied with sufficient petrol, oil and water for tomorrow's trip, maps were found and the Austrian, who spoke English, helped Dan to work out the route to Rome. He had just thanked and tipped the

mechanic and was preparing to bolt across the yard into shelter when he paused in the door of the garage, his attention arrested by the sight of a large luggage car which had rolled in through the archway. The driver and his assistant began to unload a great quantity of luggage, noticeable for the fact that from cabin trunk to hat-box it was uniformly black, with the name "Glory Stevenson" on it in large white letters. Dan remarked to the Austrian that "someone had plenty of gear." The name "Glory Stevenson" was vaguely familiar to him, though he could not actually connect it in his mind with anything, and he was too occupied at the moment with thoughts of food to think any more about it. By the time that he had removed most of the oil from his hands and face, he was late for luncheon, and there were few people left at the long refectory table.

The Princess and Horatio Swann were eating privately and sparingly upstairs as was their custom. There were no signs of Mrs. Steele, April, Harry Ames, Ivor Sneyd or Count Stanislas. But their absence did not serve to remind the ravenous Dan that he had forgotten to give an account of his peace mission to Ivor Sneyd.

He sat down in a chair next to Professor Weir and ate heartily and systematically through the luncheon.

After this, he chose an English magazine out of the smoking-room and filled with contentment, went whistling upstairs to fetch his pipe. In his room

Ivor Sneyd was waiting for him looking drawn and worried. He burst out indignantly, "Great heavens! there you are! Do you know that since twelve o'clock Stanislas and I have been positively in torture?"

"Why?" inquired Dan blankly.

"Oh, yes, ask why! I didn't entrust you with important business, did I? And of course I wouldn't expect you back with news of the result, would I? Naturally it's nothing to you that the unfortunate Stanislas has been tossing about for hours, crying out to know the worst. But as it happens his sufferings *do* mean something to me and I've been hunting high and low for you. Surely even a bog-dweller like you wouldn't want to go out on a day like this? You weren't at luncheon either! I was almost sure that I should find you *there.*"

Ivor Sneyd's sarcastic reproaches only decided Dan that he had had enough of his company. He looked for his pipe, found it, filled it, lit it and then addressed him with the words:

"Sorry you couldn't find me. I was overhauling the Princess' car. I didn't gather there was any hurry about letting you know. You can tell your friend to keep his hair on. Ames isn't thinking about him. My advice to your Count is to stay in bed and manicure his nails for a day or two."

With this uncouth attempt at wit he went out of the room, ignoring Ivor Sneyd's wail, "Oh—this is too much. . . ."

XV

THE CASTLE

THE Princess was being dressed by her maid for tea and for the interview afterwards with Rex Guggenheim. Her diaphanous dress was of a reddish amber shade that repeated with bold success the colour of her hair. Dismissing the maid, she moved slowly about the room, pausing for some time in front of a glass, lifting a cigarette from out of a jade box, standing before the glittering dressing-table to rub a lipstick once more over her mouth. Against the misty blue painted panels of the bedroom, she looked like a flamboyant tropical bird exiled to northern skies.

Horatio Swann watched her from where he was seated in a gilt and blue chair. He was glad to see that she was in one of her serenest moods. Successful contract signing demanded serenity. The approaching certitude of a satisfactory conclusion to their visit to Schloss Erlenburg had also restored him to equanimity, for he felt that all the trouble and nervous strain which he had experienced on this trip was going to prove worth while. He had been able to give his once adored Vanda (the only person in his triumphant life whom he had loved more than

himself) another proof of his abiding friendship. In his caressing voice which he could manipulate with such pleasing effect when he was in his softer moods, he complimented her on her ravishing appearance. Once as she passed him, he took one of her long white hands and told her smilingly that her hand was an *objet d'art* and was far too precious to be put to every-day use. She replied affectionately that he was an inveterate flatterer and was trying to make fun of her. Then she stretched herself on a sofa, and invited him to come and sit by her.

They discussed, and laughed over the doings of the other inmates of the castle. He gave an ironical account of what he called the Punch and Judy fight between the beef-eating Ames and the *soi-disant* Count. His voice became scathing when he mentioned the latter. His monstrous beauty was, in Horatio Swann's opinion, far more displeasing than any amount of ugliness. He pointed out cruelly that everything about the young man was a lie. He had a noble head and an insignificant brain, he had a lofty expression, yet was tarred with all sorts of brushes, while his aristocratic pose concealed the outlook of a gutter-snipe. He spoke six languages and not one of them honestly! Rex Guggenheim, in Swann's opinion, had made a great mistake in allotting to him the important rôle of Saint Dorothea's Roman admirer, as he would never be able to get his palely egotistical personality across the footlights. The Princess nodded her head in agreement, but did not seem particularly disturbed at the pros-

pect of the *jeune premier's* failure. Turning from personalities to plans they agreed that it was a relief to be leaving the next morning. The Princess, in soft, agitated tones, began to pour out to her companion her apprehensions and hopes as to her future. Life, she complained, was growing too complicated even for her, accustomed as she was to a fantastically hectic existence. Alluding to him by an uncomplimentary nick-name, they talked of her husband's machinations against her. Then noticing that the Princess' eyes were dilating and that her voice was rising tempestuously, Horatio Swann dismissed the subject of Prince Andrea Fiorivanti with a contemptuous adjective and dexterously diverted the talk on to happier lines. He held forth on the material benefits that she would reap in the near future from this engagement with Rex Guggenheim, to say nothing of the merited incense that would be offered up to her when the theatre-going worlds of two continents saw her rendering of Saint Dorothea. Soothed once more, the Princess smiled contentedly and laying her hand on his, told him that there was no incense that she valued as much as his praise. Though Horatio Swann lived in an atmosphere of perpetual feminine adulation, he had not been so pleased for a long time as he was at this remark. When she added, impulsively, that she intended to pay him back the large sums of money that he had lent her from time to time, out of the ten thousand pounds that she was to receive, he brusquely silenced her, concealing his emotion under a show of offence.

She remained for a few moments in gratified silence then, glancing at a minute watch set in her cigarette case, she suggested in honeyed accents that they had better go down to the library where tea would be prepared, and take some refreshments before going up to Rex Guggenheim's study for the business of the contract.

As she got up, she remarked that she had spoken to Rex's doctor that morning, and that he had told her that Rex had had a really serious attack of poisoning and that it had been impossible for him to attend to any business before to-day. At this Horatio Swann grunted and refused to admit that the producer might not have made an effort to see the Princess earlier. He added that he himself would not keep a lady waiting in this way for all the poisoned fish in creation.

She laid her hand lightly on his shoulder, "Ah, there are not many left like you, Horatio." Then ardently, "I am almost happy to-day!"

Dan, seated in a window recess smoking and studying a motoring map, heard their voices as they came down the corridor together. The Princess' walk generally had a suggestion of the ceremonial about it, but this afternoon she moved with a dancing rapidity that was witness to her good spirits.

He jumped to his feet and as she smiled agreeably at him, said, "I've got our route for to-morrow planned out, except for where we are to spend to-morrow night. Otherwise it's all as simple as slipping on a banana skin."

Horatio Swann laughed. "Not a very happy metaphor! However, we're very much obliged to you!"

"Yes," said the Princess softly, "you are a very good boy. I will give you a lovely character when you leave me!"

Horatio Swann remarked sarcastically to her in Italian that she usually did more taking from, than giving of, lovely characters to young men!

She darted a playful look at him and told Dan that he had better come and have tea with them. Horatio Swann added graciously that Dan could show them the route that he had made out, "between the intervals of gourmandising himself on cake."

They all went on towards the library. As they approached the door, Dan passed on ahead and threw it open for them. The room was not empty. Rex Guggenheim stood by the fireplace. By his side was a tall and handsome young woman, dressed in a black coat and skirt, a small severe black felt hat showing a clear-cut profile and two disciplined curls of yellow hair. She turned her large grey eyes upon the newcomers, with a glance that was icily self-possessed and appraising.

"Princess!" exclaimed Rex Guggenheim in a voice which he seemed to be struggling to control. "I am glad you have come in here now, though at first sight it may seem curious of me to say so."

He advanced towards her with a frightened expression on his face. "Let me explain! This lady

is Miss Glory Stevenson. I need not qualify that introduction, for of course her name speaks for itself." He was evidently trying to gain time.

The Princess paused, stared haughtily at Miss Stevenson, then swept forward with the words, "I have not the pleasure of knowing who she is."

Miss Stevenson's chiselled mouth curved with annoyance. She gave Rex Guggenheim a hard look, but remained silent. He began again, this time in calmer and more resolute tones.

"Allow me to give you a chair, Princess, and you too, Miss Stevenson. Mr. Swann, do please seat yourself." He shot an unwelcoming look at Dan which the young man ignored.

Rex Guggenheim walked away a few paces from the little group, then turned and faced them, his hands clasped Napoleonically behind his back. His manner was suave when he finally addressed them, but in his eyes could be read a determination to impose his will upon them.

"Now, ladies, this is a very delicate situation, and it's only by the combined good-will of all present that we can hope to bring it to a happy conclusion. You've all please got to help me. Mr. Swann, I rely on your tact as a man of the world to help. Princess, I want your splendid magnanimity and *grande dame* generosity. Miss Stevenson, I know, is ready to do her best for all of us. There's been a sad muddle. I am the first to admit it. Perhaps I myself have been unwittingly to blame, but if so, it was far from my intentions to hurt anyone's feel-

ings. But I am not trying to exonerate myself. My duty at the moment is to clear up matters for your benefit. Miss Stevenson having arrived a day earlier from Berlin than was expected has certainly caused unlooked-for complications. I had hoped to explain everything to the Princess quietly and thoroughly at our interview this evening."

Horatio Swann broke in with hawk-like suddenness, "What is all this you're talking about, Guggenheim? What is there to explain to the Princess? Make yourself clear at once. Who is this lady?"

Rex Guggenheim paused, then took the plunge. Averting his eyes from the Princess he said in measured tones, "Miss Stevenson is the world-famous film actress. She has consented to take the part of Saint Dorothea in my miracle play." He hurried on jerkily, "I felt that under the circumstances I owed it to my show, however repugnant to my private feelings, to make this change of plans. My deep regret is that I was not able to inform the Princess sooner. I realise that I owe a really humble apology——"

The Princess slowly turned her dilated eyes towards Horatio Swann and said, in a voice that had become hoarse with the shock, "Do you hear what that *salaud* says?"

"I hear!" thundered the great painter, rising to his feet and looking Rex Guggenheim straight in the eyes, "I hear, and I am going to ask this man if he has taken leave of his senses. What do you

mean, Guggenheim? Are you daring to suggest that this lady is to be given the Princess' part?"

Rex Guggenheim had become pale. He held up a short hand as if to stem the flood of their wrath. "Wait! I beg you to wait. Be fair! you haven't given me a chance to explain myself yet. Do you imagine that I would behave shabbily to a lady for whom I cherish the greatest respect and admiration? No, on the contrary, I am going to make a great financial sacrifice to atone for this unfortunate occurrence, the possibility of which I assure you, Princess, I never foresaw when I provisionally offered you the principal part in my play. Princess, let me speak! I am prepared to offer you the part of the Roman Empress, which luckily is still uncast; and of course though I would not be justified in such extravagance for anyone else, I am ready to make it well worth your while." He paused dramatically.

"Stop insulting me!" cried the Princess, springing to her feet in a fury, "you offered me the principal part, and I will have that or nothing. You are a cheat, a liar, a blackguard!"

"But you must be mad, stark staring mad," burst out Horatio Swann. "What is the point of this unspeakable behaviour? Why did you drag us here merely to insult the Princess? It's monstrous, it's unheard of, it's criminal!"

"Not at all, Mr. Swann. My offer to the Princess, made at your house in Paris, was *bona fide*. I intended to follow it up by an engagement. Since my return here, however, I have learnt on good

authority certain disquieting facts about the Princess' private affairs that made me realise that I might not be able to rely on her to undertake satisfactorily the very important part of the Saint. What you non-professional people don't realise is that any lack of rehearsing on the Princess' part might have proved fatal to the show. It's got to be a success—there's big money at stake. I've every reason to believe that the Princess' private affairs would have caused her, sooner or later, to have let me down."

"And what have my private affairs to do with you—little fat cad?" sneered the Princess, looking menacingly down at him from her full height.

He lost his temper and shouted at her, "What have they got to do with me? Only that I happen to be a business man and want to know how I stand. That's what they've got to do with me! Why! Just look at the laughable manner in which you proposed giving yourself a fortnight for the main rehearsals. A fortnight! Why, even a girl in village amateur theatricals would know better than that!"

Horatio Swann shouted back at him, "Why in the name of heaven didn't you tell us all this before? Your conduct is damnable, and I am going to get justice in the law courts for the Princess."

"Justice! What have you got in writing? Let me tell you, Mr. Swann, that you're talking through your hat!"

"I insist on having the part. I insist!" screamed the Princess.

"There's no question of insisting," came from Miss Stevenson in a cool drawl. "I've got Mr. Guggenheim's letter in my pochette here, offering me the part of Saint Dorothea and I'm going through with the job."

"Silence! Be quiet, you horrible girl! You have stolen the part from me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! What good will she be? She is as commonplace as an advertisement for face cream. I congratulate you, Rex Guggenheim, on your Saint Dorothea of Hollywood!"

"See here, Mr. Guggenheim, I'm not going to stand here being insulted by your tame Princess. Let me go up to my room at once, please."

"No, Miss Stevenson, I must insist on your remaining in the room!"

"What I want to know is, what did you think you were doing by daring to keep us hanging about here, while you were plotting all this dastardly affair behind our backs?"

"Mr. Swann, believe me, I had no intention of things coming to pass like this. If it hadn't been for my attack of fish poisoning . . ." Rex Guggenheim paused uncertainly.

Dan, whose presence everyone had completely forgotten, was staring at him with a peculiar expression. He broke in loudly, "That's an absolute lie, Mr. Guggenheim! You never were ill. I know someone who saw you up and about when you were supposed to be laid out flat with a temperature." There was a palpitating silence.

"Ha—now we're getting to the truth! Vanda, I fear you have been abominably treated. This scoundrel has been playing a double game. He was evidently not certain of obtaining this lady's services and so was keeping you as a second string in case she failed to materialise. Such villainy almost passes belief! My God, what baseness there is in this world!"

"Mr. Swann, pray excuse me saying so, but aren't you being a trifle theatrical? After all, we're only discussing a matter of business."

The Princess had been pacing up and down, twisting her hands in frenzied little movements. Now she stood still and with a despairing gesture commanded Guggenheim's attention.

"Mr. Guggenheim! You cannot treat me like this. Do you want to break me just for a caprice? *Mon Dieu,* what have I done that you should treat me like this? Do you not realise what this means to me? I am a ruined woman unless I can have the part. It is not right to offer food to a starving person and then to snatch it away. My enemies are waiting to devour me. Success would save me and give me a new life. Mr. Guggenheim, if you give me this chance, I promise not to allow my private imbroglios to interfere with my work. I promise to give you of my best. I promise on my honour as a San Castello!"

She stood in front of the producer like a pleading flame of fire. He was visibly moved and it seemed for a moment as if she might gain the day, but some

antagonistic thought turned the scales against the Princess. Perhaps it was the recollection of her taunt of "little fat cad." His face hardened and he made an abrupt gesture of refusal.

"No, Princess, I'm afraid it's out of the question." With a sudden burst of brutality, he added, "Fact is, to tell you the whole truth once and for all, I've come to realise during the last few days that the part of Saint Dorothea needs someone not only beautiful but also really very *young.*"

There was a stunned silence. The Princess said in a low voice, as if to herself, "This is the end."

She walked pensively to a window, opened it, looked out at the drizzling rain which fell mournfully onto the courtyard below, and then with a catlike bound sprang onto the window-seat and crouched for her leap to destruction. Dan was quicker still, hurled himself across the few yards that divided them, clutched her and dragged her down. For a moment she struggled fiercely, then with a rending sob collapsed at Horatio Swann's feet.

He pushed back Rex Guggenheim and Miss Stevenson, and aided by Dan raised her in his arms and carried her to a sofa. She lay motionless with both hands clasped over her face.

Horatio Swann turned with the fierceness of an old lion at bay, "Leave the room everybody, don't dare to touch her!"

Rex Guggenheim's face was crumpled with emotion. He made as if to speak but fell back and, followed by the film actress, slipped out of the room.

Dan mumbled, "Can I do anything?"

"Not yet, not yet. Go upstairs and wait till I send for you."

When Dan closed the library door softly behind him and looked down the corridor, it was empty. He stood in a dazed way trying to collect himself. He was deeply shaken by the scene that he had just witnessed. Pity and shocked surprise surged up in his heart. He had never really grasped the fact that people—real people that one met and talked to, not the people that one read about in the newspapers—might be driven to such a pitch of misery that they could without hesitation, plunge from this comfortable, familiar life into the unknown void of death. He tried to console himself with the thought that the Princess was not an ordinary normal sort of person and therefore might be expected to do ghastly things like this. But still, the horrifying fact remained that at this moment she might have been lying broken up on the paving stones of the courtyard below. The thought made him feel sick. He roused himself and went slowly to his room.

An hour later as he was sitting aimlessly by the window, looking out onto the damp evening, longing for the tea that he had missed, hoping that Rex Guggenheim was feeling like mud, wondering what state the unfortunate Princess was in, a remark that Horatio Swann had made the day before, came back unpleasantly to his memory. "One push and she will be over the precipice for ever." What would happen to her now? He had saved her from sui-

cide but for what future had he saved her? Would this disappointment be the means of finally unhinging her mind and so give that brute of a husband his chance of shutting her up for life? As for Rex Guggenheim, Dan could hardly bear to think of him. He was beginning to understand why people took to murder. Between hunger (it was the second meal that he had missed that day) and chivalrous wrath, he had fallen into one of his blackest moods when Horatio Swann came in.

His finely-featured face was the colour of old parchment and his voice when he spoke was tired and sad. "Ah, I want to speak to you. My first intention was of course to leave this place to-night. But she won't be able to travel till to-morrow. I suggest therefore that we go as soon as the light permits to-morrow morning. What about six o'clock?"

"Isn't that too early for her?" inquired Dan solicitously in a low voice as if he was speaking about someone who had just died.

"No, at all costs, she must leave early."

There was a long silence. Dan fetched the motoring map, spread it out on the bed, and he and Horatio Swann bent over it for a few minutes, tracing out the route to Rome with a pencil.

Then Horatio Swann straightened himself wearily, laid a hand on Dan's shoulder and said,

"Thank you for saving her."

Dan blushed to the roots of his hair and longed to make an appropriate reply, but only succeeded in

muttering, "Oh, that's all right, awfully glad to be of any use!"

Horatio Swann stroked his beard thoughtfully. "By the way, my boy, I think it would be a wise thing if you remained up here till our departure. This rococo castle is crammed with busy-bodies, and it would be impossible for you to avoid their odious questionings and pryings about this disgraceful affair."

"Rather, sir, I'll do anything you think best." Then with badly-concealed anxiety, "What about dinner? I suppose I shall be able to get it brought up here?

Horatio Swann smiled grimly, "Oh, yes, I don't expect you to go without your dinner! Even the Man with the Iron Mask was allowed his dinner regularly! No doubt there'll be several people having their dinners upstairs to-night! I must leave you now and go back to the Princess."

"How is she?" asked Dan tentatively.

Horatio Swann turned away without answering, then as he approached the door he threw over his shoulder. "How is she? She's asleep now. Her maid and I have given her an injection of morphia. She had plenty of that stuff with her, alas!" He gave him an enigmatic glance, shrugged his shoulders and went out of the room. Dan was left once more to his own uncheering thoughts. Only the knowledge that he was involved in a situation fraught with painful excitement enabled him to bear the prospect of his incarceration with equanimity. He occupied

himself by ringing the bell and telling the maid in bad German that he wanted his dinner brought to his room and that she was to knock three times. Then he locked the door behind her, took his coat off, filled his pipe and perused the motoring map again with solemn concentration. He was rewarded for his precautions when, a quarter of an hour later, there was an excited rap on the door and Ivor Sneyd's voice was heard shrilly demanding entrance. "I say—let me in at once! Why have you locked the door? Let me in, *please*. I've got something fearfully important to tell you!"

"To *ask* me," thought Dan importantly and took pleasure in remaining silent.

The door handle was rattled violently from without. The voices of Ivor Sneyd and Count Stanislas could be heard in consultation.

"My dear boy, why fatigue yourself, he is evidently not *chez lui.*"

"Oh, no, of course, the door has locked *itself!* I must get in. It's all too bogus! I must find out what he knows if anything."

"Damned cheek!" thought Dan.

"You waste your time, Ivor. Come away. He has done it with a purpose. He is not such a donkey as he so looks, that fellow!"

Dan was sorely tempted to rush out on them and tell them in plain language exactly what he thought of them. But remembering in time that he was a man upon whom a sacred trust had been laid, he had to content himself with baiting them by loudly clear-

ing his throat. This subtle taunt brought down a hail of knocks, shouts and blasphemous demands for entrance from the belligerent force.

Dan, sitting in his shirt-sleeves, his feet upon another chair, his pipe gripped pugnaciously between his teeth, grimaced joyously and remained mute.

A few scathing comments in two languages on Dan's behaviour, a final squeak of baffled annoyance from Ivor Sneyd and a remark from Count Stanislas which sounded like "Beastly fellow" and then retreating footsteps.

"Well, that's cooked their goose. Teach them not to be Nosey Parkers!" gloated Dan, considerably cheered up by this incident.

When he opened the door to the maid who wheeled in his dinner on a small table, he noticed to his surprise that a letter was lying on the napkin. The round neat writing was unfamiliar to him. The post-mark was German. He examined it for a few seconds with growing anticipation—then tore it open.

As he hoped, it was from Fiona.

Villa Rosa, Freiburg.

Dear Dan,

Thank you so much for your letter. I was awfully glad to hear from you. I can't make out a bit where you are or what you are doing, but it sounds as if you were having a wonderful time. Do write and tell me more about the castle you are staying at and about all the beauties. Have you given up the job in Sicily, I wonder? I am dying of curiosity! I am afraid I've got nothing exciting to tell you in return.

Everything very quiet here, but all the same I am very happy. I like my new master, Herr Muller, very much. He's rather an old dear and awfully clever. I am practising five hours a day and I think I am beginning to make slightly less gruesome sounds than when I arrived out here. I am also having German lessons, so you can see what a World's Worker I've become! It's getting like an oven here and I don't go out much in the day except for my lessons. There are swarms of oddities streaming through on walking tours. I saw a man wearing a headgear yesterday that would have made you laugh. It was a shingle-cap with a Helen Wills peak in front! Last Sunday Aunt Jenny and I went out by tram to an hotel in the forest and drank gallons of chocolate and cream and listened to the band. It made me think of our picnic, though of course it wasn't really a bit like! It *was* lovely, wasn't it? I haven't forgotten you either.

Your affectionate friend,

FIONA GILCHRIST

P.S.—Aunt Jenny says you are one of the nicest young men that she has met for a long time. Poor auntie! Of course, she hasn't met many!

Dan read this letter through twice with great delight, especially the bit about the picnic. He decided that she was evidently not a gushing little creature but that it was easy to read between the lines. She had not forgotten him and it was all very satisfactory. It was the first agreeable thing that had happened to him for some days. Her account of her simple, not to say industrious, life seemed to brace him up and to put things into their right focus. He suddenly realised with relief that all this business of jumping out of windows, and rows, and false-

hearted beauties, was only a passing phase in his existence. It was a world to which he could never belong, and therefore it was no use him taking it too seriously. He belonged to the world of Bally Cavan and Fiona . . . and . . . work! His heart sank a little at this last thought, but he admitted to himself that it was the plain truth. However, it did not do to let plain truths get the upper hand, so he had no intention of brooding over this one. He bestowed a sentimental kiss on Fiona's letter, and put it carefully away in his passport which he was thankful to see he had not yet lost.

At half past five next morning, knapsack on back, Dan was making his way stealthily through the sleeping castle. He stopped outside Ivor Sneyd's room and slipped a note under the door. In it was written the words, "Sorry I couldn't oblige last night. Had rather an important job on hand. No offence meant or taken! D.C." Then he passed along the silent corridors, the blurred forms of richly-ornamented cabinets, tapestries and mirrors emerging from the queer, early morning light. Outside the air was humid, mists clung in chilly lovingness to the mountain slopes. The tops of the pine trees were like black Spanish lace against the ashen sky. He had made arrangements the night before that the Pannonia-Svitza was to be ready at this hour with the hood and side curtains up, so he now found the long white car waiting for him in the cobbled yard and one of Rex Guggenheim's chauf-

feurs hanging about for a tip, and leading Gene Tunney. This member of the Princess' party had, during his three days' luxurious captivity, fattened up almost beyond recognition and his usual expression of dissatisfaction had given way to one of complacent well-being. He was a striking example of the close connection between the mind and the body. As he was assisted into the back of the car, he seemed to beam on Dan.

The car drew up smoothly at the entrance door. On his pressing the electric hooter twice discreetly, the massive doors above opened and Horatio Swann and Bianca, the maid, appeared supporting the Princess. She was a tragic figure in the bleak light. Her face was like a wax mask, her heavily-lidded eyes were pools of weariness. She was staring in front of her with a curious fixity. Under her white fur coat, she had on a black pyjama suit, a silver grey veil covered her hair. Dan opened the door of the car for her with lowered eyes and a mumbled "Good morning." He was unable to shake off the impression that he was attending a historical execution. She paused for a moment, bent forward to stroke the panther who had got onto the back seat and was curling about in token of pleasure at seeing his mistress again, and said drowsily, "Oh, poor Gene! What have you been doing? You have lost your figure, my friend. And I? What have I lost?"

Horatio Swann grumbled, "Get in, my dear, get in." He turned to Dan and asked him fretfully if all the luggage was packed into the car. He had

spent most of the night at the Princess' bedside and was worn out. Dan replied briskly that he had seen to all the luggage at the garage. A sleepy servant was now handing in the small hand baggage. Horatio Swann remembered that he had put his stick down on a chair in the hall. Dan ran up to fetch it, followed slowly by Horatio Swann who repeatedly protested, "You won't find it, you'll never find it. Oh, it's gone . . . it's gone . . . Come on—come on—we must abandon it . . . !"

Dan tracked it down to where it had rolled under a table, and they were turning to leave, when slippered foot-steps were heard scuffling down the polished staircase and Rex Guggenheim in a flowered dressing-gown precipitated himself into the hall. Warned by a vigilant secretary that the Princess and party were making a secret departure, he had leapt out of bed and rushed downstairs. He waved his arms at the sight of them and said breathlessly, "Mr. Swann, I had no idea of this! Surely you aren't going to leave me like this? There is so much I want to explain to you and to the Princess! It was impossible to get in touch with you last night. You got my messages?"

Horatio Swann's handsome face became convulsed with passion as he looked at the producer. He snarled very slowly, "Oh, yes, your messages came. Your doctor came. Your flowers came. But they were not needed. Thank you for your kindness and generosity, Mr. Guggenheim."

The vindictiveness and contempt in his tones made

Dan's blood run cold. Rex Guggenheim seemed rooted to the spot. He protested in a flat uncertain voice. "I can't tell you how I regret . . . Mr. Swann . . . I do wish you'd reconsider this decision. . . . This has been a terrible business for me. It's been such an honour for me having you. . . . I had hoped that it was going to be a most happy visit for everyone. . . . I wanted your invaluable opinion on many points connected with the play. I had hoped, if I may venture to say so, that we were going to be close friends."

His voice melted away under Horatio Swann's stony stare. He replied with terrible gentleness. "You hoped too much. This visit had only served to cement my instinctive dislike of you. Anyhow, at the best of times I could never be happy in a house like this. It's pretentious and theatrical. It's full of beautiful things arranged by a vulgar mind. What it needs is a little less money and a little more humility. As for your so-called miracle play, it's a blasphemy both against Art and the noble army of martyrs. May it be cursed as it deserves! That is all that I have got to say—good-bye." He strode out of the castle.

"Good-bye, Mr. Guggenheim. Thank you for my visit," said Dan as he followed. He had been taught in his youth the correct formula for departing guests, and he managed to convey in his soft Irish voice all the insolence that he felt towards his reprehensible host!

XVI

ARRIVAL

DOCTOR EUGENE BIENNE was one of the busiest men in Rome. Of French nationality, he had settled down in Italy on his marriage to a handsome Italian girl some ten years ago, and within a year or two of his arrival, he had operated on, or had under his supervision nearly all the "worth while" insides in the Eternal City, such was his surgical and medical genius and the power of his forceful personality. Perhaps his fellow physicians would have been pleased if he had transferred his healing activities to other spheres of labour. There were even one or two thwarted specialists who might in less civilised times have been glad to have had the brilliant interloper sewn up in a sack and thrown into the Tiber. He showed no signs, however, of leaving Rome, but on the contrary had just opened a special clinique for his advanced dietary treatment, which his enemies took as a disquieting proof that he meant to continue his sojourn amongst them. His popularity amongst his lady patients had only increased his opponents' jealousy of him, but the lady patients finding that the sympathetic doctor gave them the moral support that their husbands so often singu-

larly failed to supply, continued to come in flocks to his consulting room. He was a fine-looking man of about forty-five with a good profile and an air of vigorous health. One of his admiring female patients who was of a devout frame of mind had once remarked that he resembled Saint James in appearance, to which her husband had replied unappreciatively that as far as he could see, the resemblance ceased with the doctor's short curly beard. It was during the course of a baking, hot afternoon that the doctor received an urgent telephone message from the Hotel Ritza-Europa, asking him to come at once and see the Princess Vanda Fiorivanti. The message was sent in the name of Mr. Horatio Swann, whom he had often met in Paris at the Princess' flat. The Princess had been one of his patients for many years and he had been one of her best friends, having prevented her on more than one occasion from going off her head, committing suicide, ruining her health by trying quack cures, and of indulging in similar temperamental excesses. He had not seen her now for some time, but the day before, his wife had told him the startling news that the Princess' domestic troubles had culminated in Prince Andrea Fiorivanti having sold up her large palazzo at a moment's notice, no doubt with the intention of reimbursing himself for some of her latest extravagances.

Rome was ringing with the scandal. Madame Bienne had rushed off to the scene of the sale, had returned with a small Cannaletto, and had given her husband a graphic account of the proceedings.

She had been particularly shocked by the sight of the Princess' personal belongings being carried out in cupboards and chests to the waiting vans. A pathetic pair of golden slippers had fallen out of a drawer and had lain on the pavement exposed to the vulgar gaze.

Madame Bienne had reiterated to her husband the fact that everything had been seized, "Everything, everything, everything—even the poor woman's love letters!"

Knowing as they did something of the extent of the Princess' international intrigues, the doctor and his wife had exchanged a meaning glance. He had remarked ominously that it would be lucky for the Princess if her correspondence only fell into the hands of a stamp collector!

On receiving the telephone message from Horatio Swann, the doctor though already booked up with appointments for consultations till late that evening, decided to devote half an hour to the Princess, by curtailing the lamentations of his present patient, a liverish banker, and by making his next patient, a young married woman suffering from nothing more serious than discontent, wait beyond her time of appointment.

He found Horatio Swann waiting for him in a private sitting-room at the Hotel Ritza-Europa, a tall wild-eyed young man in attendance. Both looked dilapidated.

He cast one swift look at them, perceived that the youth was in a state of considerable exhaustion,

but otherwise was in good health, and that Horatio Swann was still more exhausted and was in bad health. He was not surprised, as he had warned him three months ago that he had incipient appendicitis, a warning that had terrified the great painter without, however, inducing him to face the operating table. He had exclaimed in a frenzied manner over and over again that he wished to die a natural death, an insult to his professional skill which the doctor had taken with amused good-nature. The doctor saw, however, that it was more than fatigue or ill-health that was responsible for the harassed expression on Horatio Swann's countenance. No doubt, he thought, it was caused by the news of the Prince Andrea Fiorivanti's latest act of hostility towards the Princess. With his kindest manner and looking in his well-cut suit the picture of fashionable health, he advanced with outstretched hand, questioning him in Italian.

Five minutes' distracted narrative from Horatio Swann accompanied by some ferocious gesticulations, put the doctor right as to the facts of the case. He nodded comprehendingly and expressed his concern in a few brief comments, as the tale of the catastrophe at Schloss Erlenburg was told to him. He could easily believe Horatio Swann's assertion that the discovery that morning of the sale at Palazza Fiorivanti had been the final blow to the Princess, and had reduced Horatio Swann himself to despair. The doctor noticed that Horatio Swann's hands were shaking slightly as he lit a cigarette and he decided

to take the situation in hand. In only fifteen minutes more than his self-allotted half an hour, he had succeeded in bringing a reasonable amount of calm and order to the distracted, travel-worn party. He went up to the Princess' rooms where he found her sobbing tempestuously and screaming her intention of shooting first her husband and then herself. At first she had refused to listen to him, hardly allowing him to speak, but by an effort of will-power, the astute doctor had managed to turn the torrent of her thoughts from her mental sufferings to her physical state. He had warned her gravely that she must take care of herself if she wished to avoid a very serious illness.

He had left her considerably subdued, trying to work out, with the aid of the devoted Bianca, one of his complicated systems of pill-taking.

Three pills the first day, one at each meal, six pills the second day, one at breakfast, two at luncheon and three at dinner, nine pills the third day, two at breakfast, three at luncheon and four at dinner, and so on in a proportionately ascending scale till the ninth day, when the treatment ebbed down to one pill once a day for five days.

When the doctor re-entered the sitting-room, he was able to reassure the anxious men as to the Princess' condition. Then after a brief conversation with Horatio Swann, he broke into English and said kindly, "And now, Mr. Swann, how are you?"

Horatio Swann quailed perceptibly before the surgeon's piercing glance and said with a pitiable

attempt at bravado, "How am I? Oh, I'm all right. Don't you worry about me, doctor, I shall do very well as long as *nobody* takes a knife to me! The knife . . . that's the thing to avoid . . . the implacable knife. . . ." He muttered the last words to himself. The doctor ignored this outburst, said solicitously, "You have felt no pains here——?" and pressed his own stalwart well-dressed person. Horatio Swann hesitated and confessed reluctantly. "Well, perhaps there have been a few twinges now and then."

"Ah, yes, your appendix has it in his mind to play on you a nasty trick!" the doctor pronounced with gusto. He could not help wishing to have Horatio Swann under his charge, as it would enable him to have some interesting talks with him about pictures. The doctor was a keen collector of pictures of the Italian and Spanish schools.

Dan grinned and asked with interest, "Have you got an appendix, sir? Oh, that's nothing! I had mine out about two years ago. I was hunting three weeks later. It's no worse than having a tooth out."

"But it is an *abominable* thing having a tooth out. It's torture! If that is all the consolation you have got to offer me, you had better keep quiet," retorted Horatio Swann with the fierceness of a trapped animal. The doctor turned and said playfully to Dan, "I should not boast yourself so loudly, my friend. I have had two cases this year of persons with appendicitis who had been operated on for their appendix by well-known surgeons," he

paused impressively. His listeners exclaimed, "How?" "Why? I don't understand!"

The doctor raised his shoulders very slowly, then suddenly dropped them and said in sinister tones, "There was an incision made, but the appendix was still there! I do not try to explain. I only tell you that one case was very acute and was brought to me in an ambulance in the night!"

There was an uneasy silence, then Dan said loyally, "Well, I am sure *our* doctor wouldn't do the dirty on one."

Horatio Swann caught him up with an excited, "You can't be sure of anything in this world! Especially when it comes to medical matters, saving your presence, doctor! After all, when one can't get three experts to agree on the authenticity of a picture, why in the name of heaven should one hope to get two of your doctors to agree on the complicated workings of the human anatomy? Of course, one has to trust them or otherwise what would become of one?" The painter glanced miserably at the doctor, who looked benignly back at him as though he were a fractious child. The thought passed through his mind that Horatio Swann's nerves would be better after his appendix had been removed. He remarked pleasantly that talking of pictures, he had just bought a Canaletto, but refrained delicately from mentioning the circumstances of its purchase.

Horatio Swann showed dreary interest.

"A Canaletto? Are you sure? What's the subject?"

The doctor replied with a trace of embarrassment, hoping as he did so that Horatio Swann would not investigate the matter further, that the subject of the picture was the Island of San Giorgio from the lagoons.

Horatio Swann with a faint revival of his accustomary fire replied, "Ah, *from the lagoons!* That's a subject that Guardi would have treated better than Canaletto, I should have said. I am afraid it's probably not much of a Canaletto. However, a Canaletto is always a Canaletto! Of course, you'd like him better than Guardi because of your being a surgeon! You'd like his precision. You'd know where you were with him. No hazy blues and all that sort of thing."

He waved his hand expressively. The doctor, knowing that he was a fanatical admirer of Guardi, tactfully let the subject drop. He said soothingly, "You are all tired. I must leave you now." He shook hands with Dan, gave him a searching glance, came to the conclusion that he had a resemblance to Horatio Swann, classified him mentally as an illegitimate son of the painter's, and left the room in friendly conversation with the latter, who insisted on seeing him down to his car.

Dan, left to himself, remained sprawling in an armchair, a cigarette in his mouth and a vacant expression on his face. He was leaving for Palermo by train the next day. Behind him lay the journey from the Tyrol, over the Brenner Pass, into the Trentino, through Verona, Bologna and Florence.

He could look back on it now, with quiet satisfaction. To his own surprise, he had been the prop and support of the discouraged party, and to fulfil this exacting rôle, he had needed all the self-control and amiability that he could muster.

He considered that the journey, taking it all round, had been an interesting experience, though his impressions of the various countrysides through which they had passed on their way down south were of the vaguest description. There had been mountains (too many mountains from a driving point of view), sweltering plains and miles of arrow-straight roads, crowded towns with narrow streets and weird traffic regulations. He remembered the principal towns quite distinctly. Verona, a puncture mended, and a row at the garage (which had given him an interesting insight into the Latin temperament!) Bologna, a near shave of running down a fascist (this incident had thrown light for him on the political condition of the country!), and finally Florence—a wonderful meal at a restaurant, which had disposed of his cherished theory that Italians lived on the smell of an oily rag. His surprised admiration had been aroused by the dash, verve and contempt of death which he had met with on the road. "They certainly were sporting chaps, these I'ties." It took a bit of nerve, he admitted admiringly, to come round a hairpin bend on the wrong side of the road without hooting. His own driving had appeared to him to be almost old-ladyish in its steadiness. There had been moments when

he had yearned to emulate the drivers who rushed past him. It had seemed such a shame to hold in the splendid car. But in his new-found rôle of prop and support to weary genius and distressed beauty, he had refrained from any attempts at over-speeding.

"They are all ready to pass out, those poor blokes at the back," he had thought on more than one occasion during the journey. That morning when the stupefied party had turned away from the door of the stripped Palazzo Fiorivanti, where a caretaker who did not even know the Princess by sight, had informed them rudely that she could not allow them to come in, without Prince Andrea Fiorivanti's permission, it had been Dan who had suggested that they should put up for the night at an hotel, and who had helped Horatio Swann to persuade the distraught Princess to postpone her plans for obtaining immediate justice and retribution. Now, though he was thankful that he had brought his two celebrated passengers safely to their journey's end, he felt regret at parting with them.

When Horatio Swann returned to the sitting-room some time afterwards, he appeared to be subdued and calm. He let himself down into a chair near Dan and said slowly, "Very sound fellow, Eugene Bienne. Very remarkable fellow in many ways. He's actually been able to restore the Princess to some degree of common-sense, for the moment at any rate. She's given up the idea of rushing round Rome, revolver in hand, demanding vengeance. She's even consented to let her lawyers

conduct the whole affair for her. She's upstairs thinking about one of those treatments which Bienne is so fond of. My own impression is that he gives them as a soothing pastime to neurotic patients. As he knows that it takes all one's leisure time working out how many pills one's got to take, when one's got to take them, and so on and so on. One of the greatest benefits that good doctors confer on poor frail humanity is that they reduce emotions to facts." He paused and went on in an injured voice, "Anyhow, I was glad to see that *she* took the news of my impending ordeal with extraordinary serenity. She actually told me that she had heard that it was considered a pleasure to watch Bienne wield the knife! A lot of good that's going to do to a chloroformed and possibly dying man!"

"But are you really going to have your appendix out?" inquired Dan with surprise.

Horatio Swann shook his head sombrely, "I don't know, I can't tell you, I wish I did know. I am quite convinced within myself that I shall never survive the anæsthetic. And even if I do, I understand that the greatest danger of an operation lies in the nursing home itself. If one gets out of them alive it speaks well for one's constitution!" He remained for a moment in moody silence, then, "Well now, what I wanted to tell you is this: The Princess insists on leaving to-morrow. Bienne says that she had better be humoured and got out of Rome before she gets into further trouble. So we are all going to Taormina in the morning. The doc-

tor has recommended a chauffeur that he knows of, to replace that drug-fiend whom we left behind in the forest, and as for you, we are of course going to give you a lift and drop you near your wine-vats."

He received Dan's thanks majestically. Then he, in his turn, graciously thanked the young man for the assistance that he had given him and the Princess, during the last week. He smiled sweetly as he said, "We little knew when we commandeered you that day at the inn, that you were going to prove such a good friend in time of need. It's been a stormy passage for some of us! Amazing the amount of fuss and unpleasantness there is in life considering its acknowledged brevity. There is surely no time to be lost, if one could only realise it."

He got up leisurely, and suggested that it was time to go down to dinner. "Not that dinner," he added crossly, "can mean much to me now. Bienne has put me back on a diet. No meat, no fish, no eggs, no salad, no haricot beans, no coffee, no wine, —I could keep you here all night enumerating the things that I am not to touch on pain of death. This dieting is a form of legalised starvation, devised with devilish cunning by the doctors to break down the will of the independent layman. Of course, now one comes to think of it, the Israelites were put on a diet after the flesh pots of Egypt. But then they richly deserved it!"

Enlarging on this subject and emphasising the salient points with a forefinger, he left the room, followed by the sympathetic but preoccupied Dan,

who, having himself at the moment a ravenous appetite, was wondering how he could indulge in a hearty meal without unduly tantalising his distinguished and unfortunate friend.

He came to the compassionate conclusion that perhaps it was better to be a Nobody with a good digestion than a Somebody on a diet!

Two months later, on a Sunday evening, Dan was sitting writing a letter in the veranda of the Wansteads' house near Palermo. He was dressed in spick and span white flannels. A tennis racquet lay at his feet on the tiled floor. It was nearly sunset and the lovely garden was gradually growing cooler.

Villa Guardamancia,
Palermo.
August 23rd.

My dear little Fiona,

I'm awfully pleased that the necklace I sent gives pleasure, etc. All I can say is that it's jolly lucky to be hanging round your dear little neck. I haven't been able to answer yours before, because I've been pretty busy getting down to things and getting the hang of this job. What ho!

I am glad to say that the job and I quite like each other. I expect that I have found my life work in my old age. Yes, you are right in your letter. It was a pretty hectic week, that business of the Princess & Co., I didn't tell you half. It wasn't fit for a young girl like you! Perhaps when you're older, you'll get the whole story out of me. Since last writing, I've had a very decent letter from Mr. H. Swann. Apparently a wire from my people hove to at Schloss E. just about 12 hours after we'd cleared out. (Poor father and

mother, they were "also rans" during the whole of the show!)—followed by a registered letter containing a goodly sum of cash. The whole outfit was forwarded C/o Mr. Swann and fetched up to him in a nursing home. He kindly sent it on to me, and mentioned that he felt ever so much fitter since having his appendix out, and that the Princess was getting a fat job on the films, which is one in the eye for that worm, Rex G. He also asked me to look him up when next in Paris, which I shall certainly do. I also mean to hang on to his letter—as Mrs. Wanstead says it'll be worth at least a £10 note one day. Ma Wanstead is awfully nice and jolly good-looking too. The Boss is a good fellow when one gets to know him. As I told you in my last letter, there was rather a strained feeling in the air at first out here on account of one thing and another connected with the journey, but it's all blown over now, and the old man seems to approve of me all right.

There has been some dirty work at the crossroads with the parents! In spite of my explaining the whole business thoroughly to them, it's taken them exactly 6 weeks and 4 days to simmer down. Of course, one must make allowances for the posts here which aren't too good. Father went completely off the deep-end at first, and though I wouldn't say so to anyone but you, Fiona, he wrote the sort of letters a fellow expects to get when he's done something disgraceful. I had to answer back pretty firmly—and, thank goodness, he's come to his senses at last. We are on the best of terms again, I'm glad to say!

Mother has been much more sensible, after the first bust up. I got a very sporting letter from her yesterday. I think the necklace I sent her the same time as yours did the trick. She is certainly one in a thousand. I think they were both a bit impressed when I told them about my getting the chauffeur's wages and thus ending up financially to the good and

only 12½ days late. In fact, I find that I've made on the trip, as there is also the parents' money per registered post to be counted in.

Glad you're working. I am working too. Perhaps one day we'll work together, or still better, play together! However, you mustn't take anything I say too seriously. I don't intend to marry till I've reached the mossy age of say thirty or so. But all the same I don't mind telling you that you are a sweet little darling.

No more now. Write soon.

With love,

Your devoted friend,

DAN

He closed the letter up, inscribed on the back of the envelope in small letters S.W.K. for "sealed with a kiss," and sat for a moment or two recovering from his epistolary labours. He reflected gratefully that his luck had certainly held much better than one might have expected under the circs, or rather *circumstances,* but then it would have been pretty rotten if it had failed him, as honestly he had meant well from beginning to end.

Ignoring the well-worn adage that the road to the lower regions is paved with good intentions, he took up his racquet and walked jauntily off in the direction of the tennis court.

(2)

THE END

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